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A Fight With A Fiend

By NICHOLAS CARTER

NICK CARTER STORIES

New Magnet Library

Not a Dull Book in This List

ALL BY NICHOLAS CARTER

Nick Carter stands for an interesting detective story. The fact that the books in this line are so uniformly good is entirely due to the work of a specialist. The man who wrote these stories produced no other type of fiction. His mind was concentrated upon the creation of new plots and situations in which his hero emerged triumphantly from all sorts of troubles and landed the criminal just where he should be—behind the bars.

The author of these stories knew more about writing detective stories than any other single person.

Following is a list of the best Nick Carter stories. They have been selected with extreme care, and we unhesitatingly recommend each of them as being fully as interesting as any detective story between cloth covers which sells at ten times the price.

If you do not know Nick Carter, buy a copy of any of the New Magnet Library books, and get acquainted. He will surprise and delight you.

ALL TITLES ALWAYS IN PRINT

850—Wanted: A Clew
851—A Tangled Skein
852—The Bullion Mystery
853—The Man of Riddles
854—A Miscarriage of Justice
855—The Gloved Hand
856—Spoilers and the Spoils
857—The Deeper Game
858—Bolts from Blue Skies
859—Unseen Foes
860—Knaves in High Places
861—The Microbe of Crime
862—In the Toils of Fear
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864—Called to Account
865—The Just and the Unjust
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875—With Shackles of Fire
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1201—The Blow of a Hammer
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1203—The Bottle with the Black Label
1204—Under False Colors
1205—A Ring of Dust
1206—The Crown Diamond
1207—The Blood-red Badge
1208—The Barrel Mystery
1209—The Photographer's Evidence
1210—Millions at Stake
1211—The Man and His Price
1212—A Double-Handed Game

In order that there may be no confusion, we desire to say that the books listed below will be issued during the respective months in New York City and vicinity. They may not reach the readers at a distance promptly, on account of delays in transportation.

To be published in July, 1927.

1213—A Strike for Freedom
1214—A Disciple of Satan

To be published in Aug., 1927.

1215—The Marked Hand
1216—A Fight with a Fiend
1217—When the Wicked Prosper

To be published in Sept., 1927.

1218—A Plunge into Crime
1219—An Artful Schemer

To be published in Oct., 1927.

1220—Reaping the Whirlwind
1221—Out of Crime's Depths

To be published in Nov., 1927.

1222—A Woman at Bay
1223—The Temple of Vice

To be published in Dec., 1927.

1224—Death at the Feast
1225—A Double Plot

A Fight with a Fiend

OR

THE HAMMERS OF FATE

BY

NICHOLAS CARTER

Author of "The Marked Hand," "A Disciple of Satan," "A Strike for Freedom," etc.

STREET & SMITH CORPORATION

PUBLISHERS

79–89 Seventh Avenue, New York

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A Fight with a Fiend

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Printed in the U. S. A.

A FIGHT WITH A FIEND.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

When Nick Carter opened his morning's mail it was the very last letter in the lot which interested him most, and after reading it through to the end twice, the detective tossed it across the table to his chief assistant, Chick, with the request that he should read it aloud. All three of his assistants, Chick, Patsy, and Ten-Ichi, were seated at the table with him and at once gave their undivided attention to the reading of the letter.

It was as follows:

"BEECHWOOD HALL, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS.
"MR. NICHOLAS CARTER, New York City.

"DEAR SIR: I am in great distress, and because I have frequently heard my brother mention your name with every degree of respect and admiration, I have decided to appeal to you. Were it possible for me to go to you, I would not ask you to come to me here, but I am only just recovering from a severe illness and am as yet unable to leave my room; therefore, I ask if you will be so good as to call upon me at my home to-morrow evening at half-past seven o'clock.

"Briefly, my brother has mysteriously disappeared. He left me one week ago this evening, to go to the Grand Central Station, there to take a train for Syracuse—this is the end of his junior year at Hamilton College. From the moment he left his home and me, there has been no trace of him whatever. He has disappeared.

"Will you come to me, Mr. Carter, and help one who is now utterly helpless herself? I shall expect you unless I hear from you to the contrary.

"NANCY GRAEME."

"It is a very simple, straightforward letter and very much to the point," said Chick, as he passed the missive back to his chief. "You will go, of course?"

"Certainly."

"It is for this evening, at half-past seven. Shall you want me, or any of us?"

"No; not for this evening. Chick, have you or have any of you, in fact, seen anything about this affair in the papers?"

"Not a word."

"Then it follows that for some reason the family have not thought it best to send out a general alarm."

"Yes," replied Chick meditatively. "I suppose that is due to pride."

At exactly half-past seven o'clock that same evening, Nick Carter's automobile drew up at the door of Beechwood Hall, an imposing edifice located on the highest land in that section of the northern end of

Manhattan Island which is now commonly called Inwood, but which, a generation ago, was included in the "Washington Heights" section of the city.

As the detective stepped from the car, a man servant came down the steps to receive him, inquiring respectfully if he were Mr. Nicholas Carter.

Satisfied as to that, he led the way into the house and presently conducted Nick up a broad and winding flight of stairs to the second story, where presently, after tapping gently against a door and being bidden to enter, he opened it and announced:

"Mr. Carter."

The detective stepped inside the room; the door was closed behind him, and he found himself in the presence of a young woman whose remarkable beauty, now heightened to etherealness by the pallor resulting from her illness, almost made him catch his breath.

She was half-reclining upon a couch among a medley of pillows, and, therefore, amid a riot of colors; and as he entered the room and approached her, she smiled up at him and extended one waxlike hand.

"You will pardon me if I do not rise to receive you, Mr. Carter?" she said, with a smile which seemed to light up the entire room. "I am still much too weak to stand upon my feet, although I am improving rapidly and getting better every day. Will you help yourself to a chair? and will you draw it near to my couch? Thank you."

"You have been severely ill, Miss Graeme?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Nobody expected that I would recover. However, I am going to get well—quite well;" and she smiled brightly at him again.

"It was your illness which called your brother to you from his college, I suppose," said the detective, going directly to the purpose of his call.

"Yes." A shadow crossed her face and a deep sigh escaped her. For an instant there was a suspicion of tears in her gray eyes, but she forced them back again bravely and smiled upon the detective again.

"When I thought I could not live, I sent for Collin," she continued. "He came at once. He was with me a week; and then he went away again, to return to college for his commencement exercises."

"And that was one week ago yesterday?"

"Yes."

"You say in your letter that there has been no trace of him since he left this house."

"Yes; that is quite true, Mr. Carter."

"What effort have you made to find a trace of him?"

"None whatever, until I sent that letter to you."

"How is that, Miss Graeme?"

"I had no idea that he had disappeared."

"Tell me, in as few words as possible, just how

you arrived at the conclusion that he *had* disappeared?"

"When Collin left me, he promised to write immediately upon his return to the college. I did not hear from him, but I thought little about it, supposing that he had decided to await his regular day for writing —Sunday."

"He has been in the habit of writing to you on Sunday?"

"Always. All our lives, whenever we have happened to be separated, we have never permitted a Sunday to pass without writing to each other. I have never done so until I was too ill to write; he has never done so until last Sunday."

"Well, Miss Graeme?"

"When I did not hear from him at the proper time, after Sunday, I telegraphed to him at the college. There came no reply, and after waiting a suitable time, I telegraphed again to the president of the college."

"He replied to you, of course."

"He replied that my brother had not been seen nor heard from since he left there to come to me."

"What did you do then?"

"I wrote the letter to you, sir."

"You did not communicate with the college again?"

"Yes. I wired to the president asking him if he would inform me by telegraph the moment he had any information concerning my brother."

"But you are really not sure that he has disappeared after all, are you?"

"I am, sir. That is, I am sure that something has happened to him. If you knew my brother, you would understand. Even if I were perfectly well, he would never have left me all this time without a word from him if he were able to send me a message. He certainly would not do so when I am ill."

"How old is your brother, Miss Graeme?"

"He was twenty last December. We are twins."

"Indeed. I should have said that you were not more than eighteen. Can you give some idea of his personal appearance? Have you a good photograph of him?"

"There is one on the table, Mr. Carter. It has been said that we resemble each other as closely as persons of opposite sexes can do so."

Nick crossed the room to the table, secured the photograph, and returned.

"The resemblance is very striking," he said, studying the picture. "I should say that when you are in robust health, it would be even more so."

"Yes," she replied. "When we were children we often masqueraded as one another. I do not doubt that we could do so still. We are exactly the same height, and, save for the fact that he is a man and I am a woman, we are precisely alike in many things —I was about to say in all things."

"Are you quite strong enough to reply to some very personal questions concerning him?"

"I am strong enough for anything which will tend to end this terrible suspense, sir."

"Will you tell me quite frankly what you know of your brother's habits?"

"I know them to have been and to be above reproach, Mr. Carter."

"Do you *know* that, or do you merely believe it to be true, Miss Graeme?"

"I *know* it, Mr. Carter. He is a boy, of course—and he is not perfect; but there has always been entire confidence between us. Collin has never deceived me. If he did anything that was reprehensible, he always told me about it. We have always been all in all to each other. I can assure you that no habit of his can be responsible for his disappearance."

"Had he a sweetheart?"

"Yes. My dearest friend. She has been traveling in Europe, but is due to arrive here the day after to-morrow."

"So your brother has not seen her recently."

"Not for two years."

"Will you tell me her name?"

"Margaret McLeod. Her home is the adjoining estate to this one. It is called Elm Park."

"This place—Beechwood Hall—has always been your home?"

"My father and grandfather have lived here during four generations, Mr. Carter."

"Are your parents living, Miss Graeme?"

A shadow crossed the exquisitely beautiful face of the young woman when the detective asked the question, and there was just the slightest instant of hesitation before she replied. Then she said:

"My mother is living. My father died when Collin and I were children—we were three years old. I have a stepfather, Mr. Carter."

"Ah! Where is your stepfather now? And your mother?"

"They are in Europe—or, rather, they are on their way there. They went by the Mediterranean route to Genoa. I suppose they have arrived by this time."

"Pardon me; but do you mean that your mother left you to go to Europe while you were so severely ill?"

"No. I was taken ill the evening of the day they sailed. I was perfectly well when they left me."

"Your illness was very sudden, then?"

"Yes. Quite so. But, really, Mr. Carter, I wish you would leave me out of the question. It is of my brother—of Collin—that I wish to talk, not of myself."

"Certainly," replied the detective. "But you must not forget that often one question has direct connection with another—especially when the subject of those

questions happen to be twins. I will ask you some more questions about your brother."

"Thank you. I only hope that it will be in my power to reply to them."

"It was one week ago yesterday that your brother left you to go to Syracuse, was it not?"

"Yes."

"At what time of the day was it?"

"At four o'clock in the afternoon. He intended to take the six-o'clock train, and he wished to stop for a moment at his club, on the way to the station."

"What is the name of his club?"

"The Corrington."

"Have you communicated with the club to know if he did stop there?"

"I directed Morgan—he is our footman—to telephone to the club. Collin had not been seen there; or, if he had been there, the clerk did not know about it."

"What method of conveyance did he employ in going from here to the station? How did he leave the house?"

"Some one came here after him in an automobile."

"Do you know who it was?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"I only know that Collin had talked with one of his friends over the telephone during the morning,

and that that friend had agreed to come after him and take him to the train."

"But you do not know who that friend was?"

"No, I do not."

"And have no idea?"

"Not the slightest, I am afraid."

"Who do you know among the friends of your brother who is the owner of an automobile?"

"Really, Mr. Carter, I think that almost all his friends own cars."

"You are, however, sure, are you not, that the person who came after him to take him to the station was some person to whom he had talked that day?"

"Oh, yes; I am positive of that much."

"Do you think you could tell me approximately the time he talked with that friend?"

"I think so. I think it was between ten and eleven in the morning. I remember that when he came into this room about that time, I asked him how he was going to get to the station, and he replied that he had just been talking with a friend who was coming after him in a motor-car."

"He did not mention the name?"

"No."

"Where is your telephone?"

"In the small reception-room off from the front hall, down-stairs."

"Will you excuse me while I make use of it for a moment?"

"Certainly."

The detective hurried away and descended the stairs to the reception-room in question. He called up Central and gave the number of the telephone he was using; then he said:

"It is very important that I should have a transcript of all the telephone calls that were asked for over this wire one week ago yesterday."

"You will have to apply to the main office for that, sir," was the reply. "Our tally-sheets have been turned in, of course, and we keep no copies of them."

"But cannot you attend to that for me and thus save me a considerable amount of time?" asked Nick. "There cannot have been more than two or three calls from here on that day. In fact, I doubt if there was actually more than one. It is very important."

"I will do what I can, sir."

"Thank you. This is Nick Carter who is making the request. I think your officials will be willing to oblige me."

"I will call you up, Mr. Carter, as soon as I find out what you wish to know," came the assurance from the opposite end of the wire; and Nick, having directed Morgan to listen for the call, returned to the room above.

"Miss Graeme," he said, as he resumed his seat,

"did your brother have a large amount of money with him when he left you?"

"I do not think so. Possibly several hundred dollars."

"That is considerable. Was he in the habit of carrying so much around with him?"

"Really, I don't know. It was his habit always to have plenty of money with him."

"And that habit was generally known?"

"I suppose so. I don't know."

"Pardon me if I ask a directly personal question which your surroundings answer even before I ask it. Your brother has inherited a large property, I suppose?"

"He will inherit it when he is twenty-one—next December."

"And you——"

"The same."

"And now—just at present—what is the source of your revenue?"

"We have each an allowance from the estate. Shall I tell you how much it is?"

"If you please."

"He has fifteen thousand a year, and I have ten."

"From the estate left by your father?"

"Yes."

"Pardon me again—I am not seeking to pry into your personal affairs, but if I am to search for your

brother and find him, I must know all there is to know about him. Does your mother also enjoy an allowance, or was a portion of the estate left directly to her by the terms of your father's will?"

Again she replied with that half-instant of hesitation. Then she replied:

"My mother received five hundred thousand dollars in lieu of dowry; the use of the homestead during her life, and twenty-five thousand dollars a year to continue as long as she should remain a widow."

"So the annuity of twenty-five thousand ceased when she remarried?"

"Yes."

"How long a time have you had a stepfather, Miss Graeme?"

"Really, Mr. Carter, I cannot understand how these matters are associated with the disappearance of my brother."

"Possibly they are not. I am seeking merely to obtain all the information I can concerning the conditions by which your brother was surrounded. How long is it since your mother married her present husband?"

"Almost two years."

"And what is her name now?"

"Her name is still Graeme. My stepfather is also my uncle. He is my father's brother."

"Ah!"

"Many years younger than my father. He is also several years younger than my mother."

"You and your brother did not approve of this match, did you?"

"Frankly, sir, we did not."

"And has the disapproval caused an estrangement in the home circle? Please do not take offense, and please answer me, Miss Graeme."

"There is no estrangement so far as our mother is concerned—that is, there is none outwardly; but we are Scotch, and we are resentful. Collin and I do not like our stepfather, and we—we ignore him. But he is rarely here. He and mother are traveling all the time. They are never here for more than a few days at a time; a week or two at the most."

"So, since your brother has been in college, you have had the home practically to yourself, I understand?"

"Yes."

It was at that moment that the footman tapped upon the door to tell the detective that there was a call for him at the telephone, and he went at once to reply to it.

As he had suspected, there had been but one call used over the phone that particular day, and it had been readily found. It proved to be the telephone number of the Corrington Club—the same club at which Collin Graeme had intended to stop for a moment while on his way to the station.

The detective thanked the operator, and then returned again to Nancy Graeme's room.

"I see that you are very tired," he said, as he resumed his seat for a moment, "and I am going to take my departure at once. To-morrow I will come to see you again—only it will be during the afternoon instead of the evening."

She looked up at him wistfully.

"Can you give me any encouragement, Mr. Carter?" she asked. "I have tried to be brave while you were with me, but—but——"

"Listen to me, Miss Graeme," said Nick gently, taking her hand between both his own, and stroking it gently. "If you were well and strong you would see this matter as I do—that is, that there is no real cause for worry at all. Something has happened, of course, but I do not believe it is anything serious. Collin has made some change in his plans after he left here, and he doubtless wrote to you about it and the letter has gone astray; or the person with whom he left it, to be mailed, has neglected to post it."

"Oh, I hope so!" she sighed.

"You must not forget that he left you in the middle of the afternoon—at four o'clock. It was broad daylight at that time. I have discovered that it was to his club that he telephoned that morning, and I shall go from here there. I have no doubt that I will find out all about him in a few hours. In the meantime,

you must promise me that you will throw the burden of all this trouble upon me, and compose yourself to rest, to-night."

"I will try."

"You must more than try. You must *do* it. You are a plucky little woman, and you must not permit this to put you back in your recovery."

"Oh, I won't. I won't."

"That's the way to talk."

"You couldn't come before four to-morrow, could you?"

"No; not very well."

"Or telephone to me?"

"I think it will be better for you to expect me at four. And now I must go. Good night."

At the door of the room he paused an instant, and then, quite casually, he asked:

"By the way, Miss Graeme, who is your physician? I hope he is a good one."

"Oh, there is none better. He is Doctor Codman."

The detective passed on down the stairs then, but, as he was leaving the house, he said to the footman:

"Morgan, what is the address of Doctor Codman?"

"Stoneyhedge Court, sir. One Hundred and Fiftieth Street."

Nick turned on his power and dashed away—and thirty minutes later he drew up in front of Stoney-

hedge Court, where, a moment later, he was ringing the doctor's bell.

It was a tall, spare, sharp-featured, gimlet-eyed, swarthy gentleman who received him in the person of Doctor Codman; a man whom the detective instantly disliked and distrusted; and with one of those swift decisions which he often acted upon, Nick decided that he would not carry out the original intention of his call.

He had intended to ask the doctor some questions about the illness of Miss Nancy Graeme, but he suddenly decided that he would not let it appear that he knew Miss Graeme at all; and so, calling up a good imitation of hoarseness, he pretended that he had somehow contracted a severe cold, and asked for a prescription for it.

Having secured his prescription and paid his fee, he took his departure, but once outside the house and in his motor-car again, he remarked to himself:

"If that chap isn't a scoundrel, I never saw one; and if there isn't some underhand work going on here somewhere, I miss my guess. Nancy Graeme was taken violently ill the evening of the day her mother and stepfather sailed away for Europe, and then, while she was still hanging between life and death, her twin brother was mysteriously spirited away. There's a nigger in the wood-pile here, somewhere, sure."

CHAPTER II.

EVIDENCES OF A CONSPIRACY.

The Corrington Club happened to be one with which the detective was entirely unfamiliar. He could not remember that there was a single member of that organization with whom he had an acquaintance, and, therefore, when he entered the club-house, he made his way at once to the clerk's desk.

"I am in search of information concerning one of your members," he said to the clerk. "I refer to Mr. Collin Graeme."

"Mr. Graeme? Oh, he is away at college."

"Yes. I know," replied the detective. "But he was at home about a week ago, and it was one week ago yesterday that he left his home to come here. He was on his way to the Grand Central Station at the time."

"Yes?" said the clerk, with mild interest.

"He should have arrived here about five o'clock in the afternoon of that day. Were you on duty at that time?"

"I certainly was."

"And you do not remember to have seen him?"

"No, sir."

"I happen to know," pursued Nick, "that at ten-forty-five o'clock that same morning, he called this

club over the telephone, and was in communication with one of the members here. It was that member who later in the day—about four in the afternoon—called for him at his home with a motor-car. Could you suggest who that friend might have been?"

"Really, sir, I could not. The personnel of this club is almost entirely composed of students. A large percentage of them own automobiles, and——"

"Could you tell me if there happens to be any person in the club at the present moment with whom Mr. Graeme is especially intimate?"

The clerk stepped outside his little office and examined the doorman's list. Then he motioned to one of the servants and directed him to find "Mr. Parsons" and to say to him that a gentleman wished to see him in the reception-room.

Five minutes later Nick rose from his chair to greet the young man who had been summoned.

"Mr. Parsons?" he said.

"Yes."

"A friend of Collin Graeme's?"

"Yes."

"I wish to know if you saw Mr. Graeme on the occasion of his last visit at home. He left the city—or is supposed to have gone away—one week ago yesterday."

'May I ask who you are, sir? And why you are

questioning me about Mr. Graeme?" Parsons inquired politely.

"Certainly," replied the detective. "I have come here at the instance of his sister, who has been very ill and who is still in a delicate state of health. She has heard nothing of her brother since the moment he left her to go to the Grand Central Station in company with a friend who called for him in a motor-car, and——"

"That friend was myself, sir."

"Indeed. Then I am fortunate to find you, Mr. Parsons."

"Isn't Graeme at his college?"

"No. He never arrived there. Will you tell me all that you know about him, Mr. Parsons?"

"Gladly. But first, will you tell me your name, sir?"

"I am Nick Carter."

"By Jove! Are you? I'm glad to know you, sir. Collin and I have often talked about you."

"That is pleasant to know. Now tell me what you did with Graeme, when you went after him to take him to the train."

"I called for him at his home at four o'clock."

"Yes; I know that. You were to stop here at the club. Did you do that?"

"No. We went first to Stoneyhedge Court."

"To see Doctor Codman?"

"Yes."

"Were you long there?"

"Possibly fifteen minutes. I did not go inside."

"Did Graeme see the doctor? Was he at his office?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go from there, and where did you leave Graeme?"

"We went directly to the Hotel Astor, and that is where I left Collin. He had some sort of an appointment there. He did not tell me what it was, but he said that he would go from there to the station by the subway, and that I was not to wait for him. However——"

"Well?"

"I was about to say that I took his grip—a dress-suit case—to the station for him and left it in the parcel-room to be called for."

"What did you do with the check which you received for the grip?"

"I put it in an envelope which I addressed to Collin. It was understood that he was to ask for the envelope; and, besides, one of the clerks there knows him by sight."

"Which one?"

"A lad named Hughes."

"Then, when you left Graeme at the Hotel Astor, that was the last you saw of him?"

"Yes."

"You have no idea what his engagement at the Astor was?"

"No."

The detective looked at his watch.

"It is rather late," he said, "but the parcel-room at the station is not yet closed. My motor is at the door. Will you ride over to the Grand Central with me?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Carter."

The detective was as greatly attracted by the personality of Isaac Parsons as he had been repelled by Doctor Codman, and he felt that this young man would gladly do everything in his power to aid in the search for Graeme.

They were only a few moments in getting to the Grand Central Station, and Nick made his way directly to the parcel-room.

"One week ago yesterday," he said to the clerk who came forward to attend to him, "this gentleman checked a dress-suit case here, and afterward placed the check in an envelope which he addressed to Collin Graeme. He left it here to be called for, for the six-o'clock train."

"Yes," replied the clerk. "I remember it. It was I who waited upon him."

"I see that you have something else to add to that statement," said the detective.

"Yes. The envelope has never been called for. The suit-case is still here, sir."

"In that case," said Nick, "you will do me a favor if you will return the suit-case to this gentleman who left it here. I am Nick Carter."

"Certainly, Mr. Carter."

Five minutes later they were again in the automobile.

"What the devil does it all mean, Mr. Carter?" asked Parsons, as soon as they were seated.

"That is more than I can say at the present moment," replied the detective evasively.

"Where are we going now?"

"To my home—if you don't mind being kept out of bed for another hour or so."

"Not at all. All night if you wish."

The detective conducted Parsons to his study, and as soon as they were comfortably seated he said to him abruptly:

"Mr. Parsons, I suppose you are an intimate friend of Graeme's, are you not?"

"I think I am closer to him than any friend he has; yes."

"I am going to be quite frank with you, Parsons."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter."

"This morning I received a letter from Graeme's sister asking me to call there. The letter stated that her brother had disappeared. I went there. I found

that she had been very ill, and supposing herself to be dying, she had sent for her brother."

"Yes; he told me that."

"Graeme and his sister are twins."

"Yes."

"Next December, when they become twenty-one, they each inherit a considerable fortune."

"Yes. Something like two and a half millions each."

"If both should happen to die before that time, the entire fortune would go to their mother."

"I suppose it would. I had not thought of that."

"Miss Graeme was taken violently ill the evening of the day her mother and stepfather sailed for Genoa. Believing that she was going to die, Miss Nancy sent for her brother—and now the brother has mysteriously disappeared. Is there any significance about the chronology of these events which impresses you, Parsons?"

"Great Heaven! You don't mean——"

"I ask if you receive any impression from these strange circumstances?"

But Parsons did not reply. He remained with his eyes fixed upon the detective, and all the shuddering horror he felt at the suggestion that had been made to him was expressed in them.

"Tell me what you know of the mother," said Nick abruptly.

"She is a very beautiful woman. She looks barely ten years older than her daughter."

"What else?"

"I have always thought her a lovely woman; incapable of——"

"Never mind that. Is she a vain woman?"

"I should say—yes."

"Are the son and daughter fond of her?"

"They were devoted to her until this marriage. They objected to that. I think there has been an estrangement since then."

"Has Collin ever said anything to you about it?"

"Never a word. He is a reserved chap; but I know that he was greatly upset by the marriage of his mother. It happened two years ago. Collin and his sister were only eighteen, then. I suppose you know that the stepfather is also their uncle?"

"Yes."

"I think—I do not know—that Collin's father and this uncle who is now the stepfather were never friendly. I do know that Collin had no idea that he had such an uncle until he suddenly appeared on the scene about a year before the mother married him."

"What is his name?"

"Angus; Angus Graeme. I don't think he is much past thirty years old."

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes."

"Give me your impression of him."

"I am prejudiced, Mr. Carter."

"Never mind that. Tell me what you think about him."

"I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a bull by the tail, if you want to know."

"Do you know what his business was before he married the widow?"

"He was a physician."

"Eh? What? A doctor? Humph! I wonder if he and Codman were acquainted before this marriage took place?"

"I can answer that question; they were. They were not only acquainted, they were partners. Codman himself told me as much."

"Partners, eh?" said Nick musingly. "Parsons, there is a deeper plot here than I at first supposed."

"What do you mean, Mr. Carter?"

"I mean that, in my opinion, Mr. Angus Graeme is playing for a stake of five millions; and that his old friend and partner, Codman, is assisting in the game. I mean that if Collin Graeme is still alive, we have got to hustle for all we're worth to save him from being murdered—and I fear that even now we are too late."

CHAPTER III.

A PLOT WITHIN A PLOT.

The following morning, at the breakfast-table, Nick said to his chief assistant:

"Chick, the very last trace I succeeded in obtaining of that young man who has disappeared—Collin Graeme by name—is at the Hotel Astor, where he went to keep some sort of an engagement with a person unknown to us. He had previously stopped for a few moments at the office of Doctor Codman, at Stoneyhedge Court, and I think it not unlikely that it was Doctor Codman whom he was to meet at the Astor.

"Here is a photograph of young Graeme which his sister gave me. I want you to take both the boys, Patsy and Ten-Ichi, with you, go to the Hotel Astor, and do your best to get on the track of young Graeme. If you find any trace of him, follow it up, only keep me posted."

"That, I suppose, is all the information you have to give me?"

"It is all the information I have at all. One of his intimate friends took him to the Astor in an automobile and left him there. No trace of him has been discovered since that moment."

"Have you yourself made any inquiries at the hotel?"

"No; not one. The field is perfectly clear to you. Do your best, Chick. Take the boys with you so you can follow up as many clues as you happen to find."

When the detective was alone he remained for some time in deep thought; but then, rising suddenly, he ordered his automobile around, and thirty minutes later he stopped it in front of the residence of one of the most celebrated of New York's great doctors. For the purposes of this story we will refer to him as Doctor Stag.

Entering, the detective found that the office was filled with patients waiting to see the doctor, and so he settled himself comfortably in one corner of the room to await his own turn.

It came at last—after an hour of waiting—and he passed inside the private office of the great physician.

"Hello, Carter!" exclaimed the doctor. "Why didn't you send in word that you were here? I could have had you in ahead of some of the others."

"Oh, I thought I'd wait my turn, doctor. I'd have had to do it, anyhow, for I want you very badly, and I know that I couldn't drag you out of here until your hours were over."

"What's the matter with you, Nick? I never knew you to require the services of a doctor, save for now and then a wound of some kind."

"It isn't myself, doctor; it's another."

"Well? Out with it. But, first, how many more were out there when you came in?"

"Three."

"Then step into that back room until I take care of them. I will be at your service after that, for I see plainly that you have something important on your mind."

"I have."

"Then wait a few moments more."

It was thirty minutes later when the doctor called the detective again into the office.

"Now, Nick," he said, "what is it?"

"Doctor," replied the detective, "I am going to ask you to do something for me that is entirely against your principles."

"The devil you are! What is it?"

"I want you to go with me to see a patient who is now under the care of another physician."

"Can't do it, Nick; not even for you. It's against every rule of ethics——"

"Oh, I know all that. But this is an exceptional case."

"All the same, Nick——"

"Wait. Do you know Doctor Codman, who has an office in Stoneyhedge Court?"

"I know that there is such a man; that is all."

"You don't know anything about him, for or against his character, do you?"

"No; if I did, I wouldn't tell you."

"Oh, yes, you would. Do you happen to know of a family named Graeme, who live on an estate at Inwood, called Beechwood Hall?"

"Yes. I was Donald Graeme's physician. He died about—let me think—seventeen years ago, I think it was. There were two children and a very beautiful young mother, I remember. I do not think I have seen or heard of any of them since that time, Nick."

"It is one of those children—the daughter—whom I want you to see."

"Can't do it, Nick, under the circumstances. If she will discharge their present doctor—Codman, did you say?—I will attend her with pleasure. I remember the father very well."

"Look here, doc, this is a desperate case. I did not intend to tell you all that I suspect, but I see that I will have to do so."

"Well?"

"I believe that Miss Nancy Graeme has been, and probably is being now, poisoned, with the connivance of Doctor Codman; or, rather, to put it plainly, *by* Doctor Codman himself."

"Good God, Nick!"

"I mean what I say, doctor."

"Then why don't you swear out a warrant and arrest him?"

"Softly, doctor, softly. You know me, and you know something about my methods. I haven't the slightest evidence that what I have said is true. The young lady herself would be the very last one to believe it. I want you for once to put that code of ethics of yours in your inside pocket and go there with me."

The doctor shook his head.

"Listen," said the detective. "I will introduce you under an assumed name. I will represent, if you like, that you are another detective—and, indeed, that is what you will be for the time being. But go there you must. I want you to see that girl."

"Tell me more about the case, Nick. Possibly I can see my way clear, then."

And the detective told him the entire story as he knew it, from beginning to end.

"You see, doctor," he said in conclusion, "it is a game of five millions. This stepfather means to possess himself of them if he can. He was once a partner with Codman—and, probably, if Codman succeeds in carrying out the instructions that have been given him, there will be one of the millions coming to him. That is the whole thing in a nutshell."

"I'll go, Nick. I'll be ready in five minutes; but get me back here as soon as you can."

"I did not intend to ask you to go there until four this afternoon."

"Now, or never, Nick. I can't go at that time, anyhow; I can, now."

"All right. My car is at the door. Do you wish to pass under an assumed name?"

"You may do as *you* please about that, Nick. When I decide to do a thing, I do it. That is all."

It was an hour later when the automobile turned into the beech-bordered driveway which led to the front entrance to the mansion; but Nick, with a forethought which afterward proved to be fortunate, guided his car around to the rear of the house before he brought it to a stop.

There he left the car, and with the doctor walked back again to the front of the house, where they found Morgan standing on the steps waiting for them. He recognized Nick instantly and bowed profoundly.

"I don't think that Miss Graeme is expecting you, sir," he said. "She told me that you were to come at four. It is now about the hour for Doctor Codman to call."

"Oh, is it?" replied Nick. "Well, Morgan, if Doctor Codman should happen to arrive while we are here, be good enough not to mention the fact that we are here, and also give us sufficient warning so that we will not have to encounter him. Will you do al that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if we should leave before he arrives, you need not let him know that we have been here at all."

"Very well, sir."

"And now will you announce me, and say that I have a friend with me. Say to your mistress that it is important that she should meet my friend."

"Very good, sir."

He returned after a moment and requested them to follow him, and, accompanied by Doctor Stag, Nick entered the room where Nancy Graeme was ill.

The detective saw at once that she was not so well as when he left her the preceding evening. She had not found the strength to leave her bed for the couch this morning; but she smiled upon the detective with an effort at her usual brightness, and reached forth her waxlike hand feebly to greet him.

But it was the doctor who took it, quite to her surprise; and Nick hastened to say:

"Miss Nancy, this call is a part of a conspiracy which you must enter into with us. It requires three to form a conspiracy, you know."

"I don't understand," she replied.

"This gentleman is Doctor Stag. You have heard of him? Of course. He was your father's friend and also his physician. He has consented to come here, very much against his will, but at my earnest solicitation. The conspiracy is that you must not tell Doctor

Codman that you have seen him. Will you promise me that?"

"But why?"

"Because I wish to be sure that you are getting the best care that can be obtained. You will promise me, won't you?"

"Is it fair to Doctor Codman?"

"We are not considering Doctor Codman; we are thinking only of you. Will you conspire with us, for your own sake?"

"Yes, yes. But what of my brother, Mr. Carter?"

"I think that we will know something about him before the day is past, Miss Nancy; and I don't believe that anything serious is the matter. But that reminds me. Have you ever said anything to Doctor Codman about his disappearance?"

"No; I have not had an opportunity. I have not seen him since day before yesterday morning. Yesterday I had no medicine all day. The nurse spilled it. The nurse is my own maid; I would have no other. But last night, after you had gone, a messenger came from the doctor with some medicine for me. I don't think I am as well this morning, with the medicine, as I was yesterday without it."

The doctor was about to ask a question, but Nick stopped him.

"I wish to say one more thing," he said, "and then I will leave you two alone together. It is this: For

the present, Miss Nancy, I very much prefer that you would say nothing to Doctor Codman about your brother, or me. Now I will leave you with Doctor Stag. I wish to speak to Morgan."

The detective left the room and descended the stairs.

"Morgan," he said to the footman, "how long have you been with this family?"

"Thirty-three years, sir. I was twenty years old when I took service with Miss Nannie's father. He was a bachelor then. His father had just died."

"You love Miss Nannie and Mr. Collin, do you not?"

"Bless you, sir, they are like my own bairn, both of them. I was almost crazy when we was afraid that Miss Nannie would die; but praise be to God she is getting well now."

"She was taken ill very suddenly, was she not?"

"Like a bolt out of the heavens, sir. I—— Whist, sir! There comes the doctor. There is a library at the rear of the house on the second floor where you can wait till he has gone, if you and your friend do not wish to see him."

The detective turned and bounded up the stairs. He entered the room without ceremony, and, crossing quickly to the bedside, he said:

"Doctor Codman is here. Doctor Stag and I will wait in the library till he has gone. In the meantime, Miss Nancy, you are not to mention the fact

that we are here, or that we have been here. Will you remember?"

"Yes," she replied; "but I do not——"

"I will explain it all a little later. For the present, trust me. Will you do that?"

"Yes," she replied, and they hurried from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

A VICTIM OF SLOW POISON.

"Well, doctor?" asked the detective, as soon as they were seated together in the library.

"You were right, Nick," was the laconic reply.

"Poison?"

"Yes."

"What kind of poison? How was it administered?"

"I can't answer that—yet. I don't know."

"Some one of the subtle, narcotic poisons, I suppose?"

"Yes. One of the preparations of foxglove, I should say, from the symptoms I have discovered."

"Did you examine the medicine that was sent to her last night, and which seems to have made her worse again?"

"No; I did not have the time. All my time was taken up in examining her, until you came to warn me that Codman was here. But I will have a look at it after he has gone."

"She is certainly not so well to-day as she was last evening."

"I haven't a doubt of that."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to look up the record of this Doctor Codman, would it?"

"I should say that it would be an excellent idea, Nick. I wish I could get a look at his face."

"Possibly we can do it. Wait here until I reconnoiter a bit."

The detective left the room silently and passed rapidly through the hall toward the front of the house.

The door opening into Nancy's room was not tightly closed, and Nick paused there for an instant.

He could hear the subdued tones of the doctor inside, as he talked to his patient, and, after listening a moment to satisfy himself that there was no likelihood that Codman would come out of the room at once, he turned and motioned to Doctor Stag, who was observing him from the door of the library; and then, a moment later, the two passed silently past the door of Nancy's room and entered that of a room almost opposite it, from the windows of which they could command a view of the driveway in front of the house.

Nick took the precaution to close and lock the door when they entered the room; and then they went to the window and seated themselves where they could obtain a good view of Codman when he should leave the house to enter his motor, which awaited him at the door. Nor had they long to wait, as it proved.

Codman was evidently in a hurry that morning, for they had barely taken their places at the window when they heard him say good-by to his patient, across the

hall, and in a moment more he appeared outside the house, beside his automobile, where he stood with his sinister face turned directly toward them while he pulled on his gauntlet gloves before entering the carriage.

The instant he turned and faced them, Stag seized the detective's arm in a viselike grip, at the same time whispering in his ear:

"I know him. You were right about him, too. I am glad that I came."

"What do you know about him?" asked the detective.

"I will tell you later—when our business here is finished. But we must lose no time. We must see at once what he has done for his patient in the short time he has been here."

They hastened back across the hall then, into Nancy's room; but only to find that she had lapsed into unconsciousness since the departure of Codman, and it was evident, too, that she had just swallowed a dose that he had left for her.

For an instant the detective stood beside the bed, appalled by what he saw, but the doctor fell at once to work upon his patient.

"Take hold of her, Nick," he commanded. "Stand her upon her feet and hold her there. So; that is right."

He quickly produced a small pocket-case, which he

always carried with him, and, having selected what he wanted from among its contents, he crushed a small pellet between his finger and thumb and sprinkled it upon her tongue.

He waited a moment after that, and then repeated the dose, watching her narrowly the while.

This time there was almost an immediate perceptible effect. Nancy's eyelids quivered; she caught her breath several times, after the manner of one who has been half-strangled with water, and then slowly she opened her eyes.

Perceiving this, the doctor directed Nick to place her back again upon the bed, and then they sat beside her, watching her, while consciousness gradually returned.

"What is the matter?" she gasped. "What has happened? Where is Doctor Codman?"

"He has gone," replied Nick quietly; and the doctor motioned him to say no more. But after a little he spoke to her himself, very quietly, very calmly.

"Miss Nancy," he said, "I knew you when you were a very little girl—not more than three years old, if you were that. I was your father's friend. I want you to trust me; to trust me implicitly. Will you do it?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Are you strong enough to tell me all that Doctor Codman said to you while he was here?"

"Yes."

"What was it? Begin at the beginning; at the moment when he entered the room, and tell me everything."

"He first asked me how I was feeling, and I told him not so well as yesterday. He asked if I had taken my medicine regularly, and I told him about not having any to take yesterday, and that I thought I had felt much stronger and better without it."

"What did he say to that?"

"He laughed. Then he asked if I had taken the medicine he sent to me last night, and I replied that I had."

"And then?"

"Then he gave me a pellet to dissolve on my tongue; but the moment I had taken it I began to feel very strangely. I felt as if I were floating in the air; as if I could not touch with my hands or feet anything that was substantial. A sort of haze gathered over my eyes, but I was, nevertheless, conscious."

"What did he do? Tell me, Nancy?"

"He bent over me. He lifted my eyelids with his fingers. He took one of my hands in his and seemed to count my pulse-beats, and I heard him say that one more such dose would do the work. I don't know what he meant by that, do you?"

"Perhaps. What else?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes."

"He leaned over me and pressed his lips against my forehead, and I heard him whisper something about somebody's thinking that I was dead, but that he would fool them all. I remember distinctly that he said: 'Nancy, you and I will fool them all, won't we?' I could not answer, and that is the last I remember until I opened my eyes to find that you had returned."

The doctor turned away; but he said:

"Sit down here, Nick, beside her, and talk to her. It will not harm her to talk, and to listen to you. Indeed, it will do her good. I wish to spend a few minutes in examining the medicines that Codman has left."

The detective drew his chair close beside the bed, and, taking one of Nancy's hands in his own, he held it while he talked to her in a low tone.

"Tell me about this nurse you have," he said. "Your maid, you said she was."

"Yes."

"Has she been with you long?"

"No; only a month."

"Do you like her? And do you trust her?"

"I suppose so. I have not thought about it."

"Where is she now?"

"I let her go out for the morning. She is to return at noon. I did not think that I needed her."

The detective glanced at his watch; it was not yet eleven o'clock.

"Where was she when I was here last night?" he asked.

"I had sent her to the city on an errand. I did not wish her to be here when you came."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It was my feeling."

"I suppose she knows about your anxiety about your brother?"

"Yes."

"I think, Miss Nancy, that I will venture to take a great liberty with your affairs."

"A great liberty? What is it?"

"I am going to tell Morgan to pay the maid a month's wages in advance and discharge her. May I do that?"

"But why, sir?"

"I think it is necessary, and I think the doctor will agree with me. We wish to see you get well at once, and it is quite necessary that you should be directly under the care of some person whom we can trust implicitly. I will supply such a person. I will telephone for her before I leave the house. I do not want your present nurse to enter this room again."

"Mr. Carter is quite right, Miss Nannie," said the doctor, who had approached the bedside and who, therefore, overheard the last remark of Nick's.

"You frighten me!" she murmured breathlessly.

For a full minute the doctor stood quite still, studying her, and then, as if he spoke half to himself, he said:

"I think you are strong enough. I think you are brave enough. I will risk it."

"Risk what, doctor? What do you mean?"

"I have decided, Miss Nancy, that it will be best to take you entirely into our confidence. I think you are strong enough and brave enough to hear the truth. You are a brave girl. We need your help, even as you need ours, and you must try to help us."

"I will try; but you mystify me."

"Nancy," said the doctor kindly, bending over her and resting one hand lightly upon her forehead, "you have not been made ill by natural causes; you have been rendered so by the use of subtle poisons, dexterously administered."

"Doctor!"

"It is only too true, Nancy."

"By Doctor Codman?"

"Yes; by Doctor Codman."

"But why? Why?"

"Who can tell just why, now, my child? That is something which Mr. Carter will have to discover for you. But the fact remains the same."

He looked around for the detective, but discovered

that Nick had left the room, evidently to telephone for a nurse, and he continued:

"Tell me, child, has Doctor Codman ever made love to you?"

"Yes," she replied, in a whisper.

"Have you encouraged him—ever?"

"No; oh, no. I have not. I could not think of him in such a way. Besides——"

"Besides what, Nancy?"

"He is a friend of my stepfather. I do not entirely trust him. I do not think I like him, although I have thought he was a splendid doctor."

"He is a heartless fiend, Nancy; a fiend——"

He stopped suddenly, for happening to half-turn his head, he discovered that a woman, evidently the maid who was acting as nurse, had entered the room and was standing close beside him. He knew at once, from her expression, that she had overheard his remarks about Doctor Codman.

Before the doctor could utter a word—in fact, before there was time to do so—the door of the room opened suddenly, and Nick Carter stepped inside.

Without a word he advanced to the bed with rapid strides, and, seizing the maid by the arm with no gentle grasp, he said to her:

"I wish a word with you outside, if you please."

And then, in spite of the resistance she offered—

and she did attempt to resist him—he drew her quickly toward the door and through it, closing it after them.

But he did not pause there, for he well knew that the sound of their voices, when they talked, could be heard in the room beyond; so he drew her along the hall with him to the small library-room where he and Doctor Stag had first concealed themselves, at the time of the arrival of Codman at the house.

Nick drew her after him inside the room, closing and locking the door after him. And then he withdrew the key and dropped it into one of his pockets.

He turned his back to her as he did so, and the act came near to costing him his life; for instantly the woman drew a short dagger from her bosom, and, turning upon him with the quickness of a cat, she attempted to plunge it into his back.

But Nick heard the swishing of her garments, and wheeled just in time to catch her arm as the weapon was descending upon him. In an instant he had twisted the dagger from her grasp, and had seated her, none too gently, among the pillows of the couch between the windows of the room.

"So," he said. "That is your game, is it? I am not surprised. I am glad you did that, for now I have ample excuse for detaining you."

"You *dare* not detain me!" she cried out, attempting to rise from the couch and confront him; but he forced her back again.

"If you make another effort to leave that seat," he said coldly, "I will fasten you there with a pair of handcuffs. What is your name?"

"Find out!" she retorted sneeringly.

"Oh, I can find out all right enough," replied Nick. "I have no doubt that there is a record of it at police headquarters. I wouldn't be surprised if your picture is there, too. What is your name? What is the name by which you are known here?"

"Jane Gore," she replied sullenly.

"At whose instigation did you secure the position of maid to Miss Graeme?"

"At my own. Whose else's?"

"You have been here a month. Was it decided a month ago that Miss Graeme was to be put to death by slow poison, and that her brother was to be abducted and murdered?" asked the detective coolly.

The woman shrank visibly under the detective's searching eyes; but she recovered herself almost instantly and attempted to laugh. The effort was a dismal failure, however, and she started to her feet again in desperation.

But Nick was ready for her this time. He realized that in order to get any information from this woman he would have to adopt harsh measures, and so now he seized her, whirled her around so that her back was toward him, and quickly snapping handcuffs upon her wrists behind her back, he forced her into one of

the chairs and, with a second pair of irons, fastened her there.

"Perhaps you will remain seated now, until I tell you to rise," he said grimly.

It was plainly to be seen that she was frightened now, for she breathed out, in a half-whisper:

"You are a detective!"

"Yes," replied Nick. "I am a detective. I am Nick Carter. Ever hear of me?"

He watched her narrowly, and he saw her shrink down into her chair almost as if she had received a blow; and then, without any warning, she suddenly began to sob.

"Who induced you to come to this house to act as maid to Miss Graeme?" demanded Nick again; and this time she replied.

"Doctor Codman," she said.

"Did he tell you what you were to do while you were here?"

"Not at that time."

"When did he tell you?"

"The morning of the day that Mr. and Mrs. Graeme sailed for Europe."

"What did he say to you then?"

"He told me that it was more than likely that Miss Graeme would require the services of a doctor before she would be twenty-four hours older, and that I was to be sure that he was summoned."

"Well? And since then?"

"Nothing since then."

"You are lying, Jane Gore."

"I am not. I have only given the medicines as I was directed to do by the doctor."

"Did you not know all the time that Miss Graeme was being poisoned?"

"I suspected it."

"Didn't you *know* it?"

"No."

"How long have you known Doctor Codman?"

"All my life. He is my brother."

"Your brother! You are a fit pair. Where is Collin Graeme?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about him at all."

"You are not telling me the truth."

The woman shrugged her shoulders and did not reply.

"Jane," said the detective slowly, "I have enough evidence already to send you to State's prison for twenty years or more, if not for life. If you make a clean breast of this whole affair; if you will tell me this entire plot from start to finish, sparing nobody, I will make it extremely light for you—possibly I can see that you get off altogether. Will you do it?"

"There isn't anything to tell."

"Stop and think a moment. Answer all my ques-

tions truthfully and I will promise to let you go free; that is, I will set you at liberty after a few days."

A cunning gleam came into her eyes, which did not escape the notice of the detective; but he pretended not to notice it.

"Who is the instigator of this plot against Collin Graeme and his sister?" asked Nick.

"I don't know that there is any plot against them."

"Doctor Codman is slowly poisoning Nancy Graeme. You know that."

"I have told you that I suspected it. I do not know it."

"Who is behind him in that dastardly work?"

"I don't know."

"Angus Graeme was once your brother's partner, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Aberdeen, Scotland."

"How long ago?"

"Five years."

"How much money were you to receive for your part in this work, Jane?"

The question was asked suddenly and quite unexpectedly, and it caught her off her guard. Her temper got the best of her, and before she could control herself she had replied:

"That's none of your business."

"Good. That is all I care to know on that point. Now tell me what has been done with Collin Graeme."

"I don't know anything about Collin Graeme, I tell you."

"You know that he went to the Hotel Astor, a week ago, to meet your brother, do you not?"

She started, but she remained sullenly silent.

"You know that he never got farther toward his journey's end than that hotel, do you not, Jane?"

Sullen silence was the only reply.

"I see," said Nick calmly, "that I will have to make an example of you, Jane."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded suddenly, evidently startled.

"You will find that out soon enough. I am going to leave you here alone for a few moments to think matters over by yourself. When I return, possibly you will have made up your mind to talk. If you have decided to do so, well and good; if you have not, you go with me from here directly to police headquarters, and there I will introduce you to what is known as the third degree. You will be glad enough to tell all you know when once you are up against that proposition."

She became perceptibly paler under his veiled threat, but she made no reply, and Nick, remembering that her hands were fastened behind her back and that an extra pair of handcuffs pinioned her to the chair in

which she was seated, unlocked the door, and, without a backward glance, passed outside.

Then he closed and locked the door after him, leaving the key in the lock; and at once he sought the room where he had left Doctor Stag with Nancy Graeme.

The doctor was seated in the chair beside the bed, and Nick noticed that Nancy looked perceptibly brighter.

"Good!" he said. "Our patient is improving."

"Decidedly," replied the doctor. "I have taken her into my confidence. I have told her everything."

"Everything?" asked Nick, in surprise.

"Yes. She knows all now. She believes that her stepfather is behind the whole plot, but we are both convinced that her mother knows nothing about it."

"Of course not." Nick turned to the young woman on the bed.

"Miss Nancy," he said, "I do not approve of this course. I do not think you should have been told about all this, but since you do know it, you must aid us."

"I will do everything in my power. Tell me what I am to do."

The detective was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"I have sent for a nurse, whom I know well, to come here at once by the fastest automobile that can

be obtained. With her there will be a detective from the central office, who will remain here on guard so long as his services are necessary. Doctor Stag will call upon you as frequently as he deems necessary, and you will aid us by using all your efforts to get well again as rapidly as possible. Do you think you can do that?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that. I am very weak, but the doctor——"

"Tell me how she is, doctor," interrupted the detective.

"She is much better than could be expected. I do not now know the poison that has been used, but I have Codman's mixtures here, and I will soon find out what they are. Nancy has had one sinking spell since you went out, but I brought her out of it. She knows just what to do if another one should come on. And now, Nick, I *must* be going. Think of all the patients who are awaiting me."

"Very well. I hear an automobile at the door. I think our nurse has arrived. I will bring her to the room and introduce her to you, Miss Nancy, and the doctor will tell her exactly what to do for you. Come, doctor."

In the hallway outside the room Nick turned his eyes toward the library door, behind which Jane Gore was supposed to be a prisoner; but as he looked he started violently.

The door which he had left securely locked on the outside stood wide ajar, and when he ran toward it and peeered inside the room, his worst fears were realized.

The room was empty.

Jane Gore had disappeared. She had slipped her handcuffs and made good her escape.

"I had a slicker proposition on hand than I supposed," said the detective, as he gazed into the small room from which Jane Gore had made her escape.

"She has gone, all right," said the doctor.

"Yes. Shall I tell you how she did it? She is evidently one of the few people who possess hands that are almost boneless. I mean by that that it is possible for her to make her hands so small that she could easily slip them through any handcuffs that would fit upon her wrists. I have known men—and big men, too—who could do that very thing. It is a muscular contraction of the hand which renders it of the same circumference as the wrist."

"But, even so," said the doctor. "How did she get out of the room?"

The detective removed the key from the lock of the door, and, after studying it a moment, handed it to the doctor.

"Look at the plunger of that key," he said. "Do you see some very small and faint marks upon it?"

"Yes."

"Those are made by an instrument which is known as key-forceps. With one of those small tools in your hand it is as easy to turn a key from one side of the door as the other. As easy as if one had hold of the shank of the key itself."

"She must have made her escape the moment you left her alone, Nick."

"Without doubt. But it isn't her escape that I mind so much."

"What, then?"

"The fact that she will warn her brother——"

"Her brother?"

"Doctor Codman is her brother. She will warn him of all that has taken place here. She has doubtless done it already—by telephone."

They descended the stairs, and there the detective asked the footman about the woman.

"Why," he replied, "it was some time ago that she came down-stairs. She said that she was hurrying to the drug-store for the doctor;" and that was all there was to discover.

"I think, doctor, that there is no time to lose," said Nick. "It is up to me to get to the office of Doctor Codman just as quickly as it can be done, and so, if you please, we will lose no time in installing the new nurse and in telling the officer from headquarters just what he is to do."

The detective conducted the nurse to Nancy's room

and left her with the doctor and his patient; then he called the officer aside and said to him:

"If Miss Graeme should ask for Morgan, her footman, you are to admit him to her presence; but on no account whatever is any other person save the nurse, the doctor, or myself to be admitted. I, or the doctor, or both of us, will return here some time this afternoon or evening. Neither of us will send you any written message, so if one should be brought here, purporting to come from either of us, detain the person who brings it. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Then, there is the telephone. I do not think that I will have occasion to telephone to you, but, if I should, you are to ask: 'Who is it?' and I will reply by spelling out the word 'K-i-s-m-e-t.' I think that is all. We are up against a hard proposition—a very slick article, and we must be all the time thoroughly on our guard."

"I understand."

Five minutes after that Nick and the physician were in the motor-car, dashing cityward with all speed; but as they approached One Hundred and Fiftieth Street the detective turned to the doctor.

"Stag," he said, "can you spare five minutes more?"

"Hardly. Why?"

"I want to stop at Codman's office."

"Go ahead, then."

When they drew up before Stoneyhedge Court, Nick leaped to the pavement and hurried inside; but when he rang the doctor's bell the summons was answered by a burly negro.

"The doctor is making his calls," he said, in reply to Nick's question. "He won't be back till four o'clock, sir."

Nick hesitated a moment. It was his impulse to go inside the office and look around, to discover if the doctor had made any hurried preparations for leaving; but he decided not to do so, and so he turned away and returned to the automobile.

"As I suspected," he said to the doctor, "the bird has flown. I will take you to your office now, doctor."

"It is about time I was there."

"What time do you think you should see Nancy again?"

"It isn't what time I should see her, it is what time I can see her. I cannot possibly make it to get there before late this evening, Nick."

"Tell me what time and I will come after you and take you there."

"Very good. Call for me at eight o'clock."

CHAPTER V.

THE WORK OF A FIEND.

It was two o'clock when the detective arrived at his own home, and he found Chick there, awaiting him.

"What news, Chick?" asked Nick.

"Mighty little, I am afraid. I found the trail, but I lost it again at once."

"Tell me about it."

"The chap who runs the cigar-stand knows young Graeme by sight. He remembers perfectly having seen him enter the hotel by the gentlemen's entrance, a week ago yesterday."

"Well?"

"It seems that one of the regular patrons of the hotel bar and cigar-stand is Doctor Codman, so he also knows him, and he remembers that Codman and young Graeme met directly in front of the counter, had a cigar together, and then walked away in the direction of the bar."

"What more?"

"Nothing more. I cannot find another person around the hotel who remembers having seen either of them."

"Then the probability is that they left the hotel at once—and together."

"I think so."

"Where are Patsy and Ten-Ichi?"

"Patsy is at the hotel now, watching and waiting, in the hope that something may turn up. I couldn't think of anything better to do with him."

"No. And Ten-Ichi?"

"I sent Ten-Ichi to the doctor's house, to keep an eye out there, and with instructions to follow him wherever he went."

"You did? What time was that?"

"Two hours ago, at least."

"Good! Perhaps he was in time."

"In time for what, Nick?"

"We have had to show our hand. Codman has been warned by his sister, who was playing nurse for Miss Graeme—and he has skipped. I only hope that Ten-Ichi got there in time to follow him. By the way, Chick, there is one thing that we neglected."

"What is that?"

"The hospitals. I have no idea that Collin Graeme is in any of them, but it would be as well to make inquiry."

"I have already done that," replied Chick. "While I was waiting here for you I have telephoned to every hospital in the city. There is nobody in any of them who answers to the description of Collin Graeme."

The detective was silent for a moment. Then, rising to his feet, he said:

"Chick, I think I will go in person and hang around the Hotel Astor for the remainder of the afternoon. I will have my dinner there, too."

"All right."

"I want you to remain here at home. This evening you will take the automobile, and at eight o'clock call for Doctor Stag. When you have got him, go to the Astor after me. I will be awaiting you on the steps at ten minutes past eight."

"Very good."

When the detective strolled into the hotel half an hour later he had made just a slight alteration in his appearance; just enough change so that if he should happen to encounter the wily doctor the latter would not recognize him as the patient who had called upon him for a prescription for a cold.

He found Patsy presently, but the lad had no information to give him, and so the detective strolled over to the cigar-counter, and, having made himself known, reminded the clerk of the conversation he had already had with Chick that day.

"I have been wondering," the detective said, "if you could not recall a scrap or two of the conversation you heard between Doctor Codman and Collin Graeme."

"I do remember one thing that was said," replied the man, whose name was Porter.

"What was it?"

"I remember that young Graeme said to the doctor: 'You know I must catch that six-o'clock train?' and the doctor replied, just as they were turning away: 'Oh, you can make that easy enough. I came down in my automobile, and——' And that is all I heard."

The detective went outside the hotel and called the carriage officer to him.

"Tom," he said, "have you got a good memory?"

"I reckon so, sir."

"There is a gentleman who comes here frequently in an automobile. He is a doctor. He goes inside for a drink, remains only a short time usually, and comes out again. Now——"

"Do you mean Doctor Codman, sir?"

"Yes."

"I ain't seen him for a week, sir. I reckon he's out of town. The last time he was here he and a young man went away together, and I reckon they was goin' to see some other doctor, for I heard the young man say that if they did not find the doctor in his office, he really must not wait, because he had to catch a train."

As the detective turned away, he murmured to himself:

"I begin to see how the plot was worked. Codman has insisted upon seeing Collin before he went back to his college. The doctor has pretended that he wanted

the boy to go with him to consult another physician about his sister's case. In that way he has succeeded in luring him to some place where he could easily be overpowered and captured—if not killed. It is very plain that I must abandon the direct effort to find Collin just now, and must bend all my energies to the capture of Doctor Codman."

He passed the remainder of the afternoon at the hotel, hoping that the attractions which the resort possessed for Codman would draw him there; but he did not come; and at ten minutes past eight he stood on the front steps of the hostelry when Chick and Doctor Stag arrived.

"Come, Patsy," said the detective. "You may as well go with us. There is no use in your remaining here any longer."

As the car glided northward, Nick gradually increased the speed as much as he dared to do, for he suddenly felt the oppression of anxiety. A premonition that something untoward had happened was upon him, and in a surprisingly short time, considering the distance, they came to a stop before the door of Beechwood Hall.

Morgan was not on the steps to greet him. There were no lights in the house. Everything was as silent as the grave, and Nick, realizing instantly that something had happened, leaped to the ground and dashed inside.

He knew where the electric switch was located, and he turned it on, flooding the hall with light.

An astounding sight met his gaze.

The footman, Morgan, and the special officer from headquarters were lying upon the floor, unconscious or dead, he did not stop to discover which. But he dashed up the stairs and directly to the room occupied by Nancy Graeme, and here again, having snapped on the switch, an appalling discovery awaited him.

The nurse was lying unconscious upon the couch; and Nancy, with her hands folded across her breast and a smile on her lips, was cold and lifeless upon the bed.

The doctor had followed Nick up the stairs; Chick and Patsy remained below, for Doctor Stag had directed them to look out for the two men who were there.

The appearance of things was that wholesale murder had been committed during their absence. But how? How had it been accomplished?

The doctor devoted his first attention to Nancy, and as he bent above her, felt of her pulse, listened for a heart-beat, touched her forehead, and otherwise made a cursory examination, he sighed.

"Is she dead?" asked Nick, in a half-whisper.

"I fear so, Nick," replied the doctor. "I am not sure yet. It is terrible! Awful!"

He got down on his knees beside the bed, and he

pressed his ear over her heart, and held it there for a long time, and at last he rose to his feet and turned a strained and tired face toward the detective.

"Nick," he said slowly, "here is every appearance of death—and yet—and yet——"

"Well?"

"Something that is deeper and greater than my science tells me that this girl lives. You—I do not know how to say it—you will think it strange in one who is so devoted to science as I am, to make such a statement. There is not one doctor in a thousand who would not pronounce this girl dead; but—— Go away. Leave me alone with her for a while. I will come to you when I have finished with my examination, Nick."

"The nurse is not dead," said Nick. "She is breathing, very faintly."

"Yes. I know. So are the others down-stairs. They have all been drugged, somehow. Drugged in order that that fiend of a doctor could get to this poor girl without interference. I suspect that the servants in the other part of the house have been drugged in the same way. It is for you to discover how it was done. Leave me now. Leave me with Nancy."

The detective closed the door after him and descended the stairs slowly to the parlor floor—and he reached the bottom just in time to see Patsy reel and fall into Chick's arms.

With a bound he was beside them.

"What is all this, Chick?" he demanded. "What has happened? What has Patsy done? What has he eaten?"

Chick, who was carrying Patsy toward a couch, nodded his head toward a basket of fruit, now more than half-emptied, which stood upon the table in the hall.

"He was eating one of those pears," replied Chick. "I saw him stagger, and I ran toward him. You know the rest."

Patsy was now as unconscious as were the footman and the special officer; but he was breathing, and there seemed to be nothing that they could do save to wait until the effects of the drug had passed off.

As Nick examined the other two men, he discovered, or thought he did, that they were getting better; that the effects of the drug they had taken were gradually wearing off, and, realizing that there was absolutely nothing that could be done for Patsy then, he left Chick in charge of the hall and made his own way to the rear of the house.

There were only two servants there—the cook and a waitress. But they were both in the kitchen and both were unconscious, seated in chairs beside the table, upon which were several of the pears and peaches that had been taken from the basket.

He left the cook and the waitress where he found

them, and returned to the hallway; and there he found that Morgan, the footman, had partially recovered, and would soon be able to talk.

Within half an hour from that time the footman was able to tell what he knew, and his story, in brief, was to the effect that about four o'clock that afternoon a messenger had appeared at the house, bearing a large basket of fruit, and with it a note addressed to Morgan—a note which purported to be from the detective. The note was:

"MORGAN: This basket of fruit has just been given to me to send to Miss Graeme. I do not think that she should have any of it. It would not be good for her; but you and the other servants might as well dispose of it. NICHOLAS CARTER."

That was all—but it was sufficient. They had eaten of the fruit—and they had met with the consequences.

The officer presently recovered consciousness, but he could add nothing to the information already supplied by Morgan, nor was there need that he should.

It was only too plain that the fruit had been hypodermically doctored so that all who ate of it should speedily become unconscious. As soon as that happened the way was open for Doctor Codman to enter the house boldly and work his will unmolested.

"Judging from the effect of the drug upon the others," said Nick to his assistant, "it will be about four

hours before Patsy recovers from his attack. Make him as comfortable as you can in the meantime."

"How is the young lady?" asked Chick.

"Dead, I fear. I don't know. I am waiting for the doctor to finish his examination."

"She did not eat any of the fruit, according to the terms of that note," said Chick. "It would not have been given to her under the circumstances—when they supposed that you had directed otherwise."

"No; she has been given a different, and, I fear, a much more deadly poison. Great Scott, Chick! To think that even Patsy should be fool enough to tackle that fruit! It will teach him a lesson, I hope."

"There is the doctor," said Chick quietly.

Nick turned and ran up the stairs to where the doctor was awaiting him.

"Come inside the room, Nick," the doctor said. "The nurse has recovered consciousness, but is very weak. I have taken her to another room. Come."

The detective followed him inside, and together they went to the bedside where for a full minute they both stood silently regarding the still form upon the bed.

"Nick," said the doctor presently, "I am going to repeat something that I said to you before you left this room."

"What is that, doctor?"

"I said that there was not one doctor in a thousand

who would not pronounce that girl to be dead, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"I repeat it."

"Well?"

"Nevertheless—*she is not dead!*"

"Thank God for that!"

"So far as appearances go, she is dead. A coroner would pronounce her dead. Ninety-nine doctors out of a hundred would say that she died of heart failure. You are familiar with Shakespeare, are you not?"

"Quite so."

"You remember 'Romeo and Juliet'?"

"Certainly. Great Scott! doctor——"

"Wait. Listen to me."

"I am all attention."

"This Doctor Codman is evidently a toxicologist of wonderful ability. I have no doubt that it is his hobby; that he has made it a life study."

"Well?"

"You remember that in Shakespeare's play *Juliet* swallowed a drug which produced upon her the effect of suspended animation, and that, although she was consigned to a tomb, she was later restored to consciousness. It has always been supposed among the medical fraternity that this was a mere creation of Shakespeare's; but there have been those who have

insisted that the Borgias, and the poisoners of Venice and Rome, knew of such a poison. Certain it is that they manufactured many poisons of which we now know nothing."

"And you think that such a poison as that has been administered to Nancy?" asked Nick.

"Frankly, that is exactly what I think. Listen again."

"You have already told me what your opinion is of the circumstances surrounding us here. You have called it a game for five millions."

"Yes."

"A plot which has found its origin in the brain of the stepfather of this child."

"Yes."

"And you have given it as your opinion that this Doctor Codman, for his part of the work, is to receive a few hundred thousands, or, possibly, a million."

"Yes."

"It is *my* opinion that he is playing for the whole five millions."

"I see what you mean," said the detective quickly.

"Let *me* tell what I mean, Nick. Let me have the satisfaction of having done a little detective work for once in my life."

"Go ahead, doctor."

"If the brother is dead and out of the way, the sister inherits the entire property."

"Certainly."

"If the sister is supposed to be dead she will be taken to the magnificent mausoleum of the family, at Woodlawn, and there placed in one of the receiving-vaults it contains; *and that is Doctor Codman's plan.*"

"Go on, doctor."

"It is my belief that it is his intention to go to that tomb, after a certain lapse of time, to enter it, and to take from it the body of this girl. Doubtless he will time himself so that he will be on hand at the very moment of her awakening, *for in that case, even if he were discovered, he could pose as being her savior.* Don't you see?"

"Yes."

"He could explain his presence there in any one of a dozen ways. He could say that he dreamed that she had been buried alive. No matter what explanation he gave, nobody would believe the real one possible, even if it should occur to anybody to guess it."

"That is true."

"And after that, whatever action we might bring against him, for having poisoned the girl, would fall utterly flat in the face of what he had done to save her from the horrible fate of being buried alive—*and, although I have examined those medicines that I took*

home with me, I cannot determine what the poisons are."

"I understand you, doctor, thoroughly."

"Codman could snap his fingers at us—and he means to do it. He means, by hook or by crook, to marry the girl and to get the whole five millions."

"Wait a minute, doctor; let me think," said Nick; and, after a minute, he added:

"Doctor Stag, will you make out a death-certificate, and make it out so well that there will be no danger of an inquiry by the authorities?"

"What do you mean, Nick?"

"I mean that I wish it to be generally supposed that Nancy is dead. I mean that we will spirit Nancy away to your house, where you can watch her night and day. I mean that we will put a dummy inside the coffin, and send *that* to the mausoleum; and I mean that afterward, if I cannot find Codman in any other way, I will wait for him at the mausoleum. If Nancy Codman is not dead, she will come to life in your house, and if Codman goes to the cemetery after her, he will find Nick Carter there, ready to receive him. That's what I mean."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN THE DEAD COMES TO LIFE.

It was just a week to a day later when Nick Carter, while at the breakfast-table, received a short, peremptory message from Doctor Stag. It read:

"Come to my office at ten-thirty this morning."

"STAG."

During the week that had passed the funeral of Nancy Graeme had taken place, and, as Nick had planned, a dummy was sent to the tomb in place of the body of the girl. Nancy had been conveyed secretly to the doctor's house, where he had assumed full charge and entire responsibility in the matter.

And also, during that week, Nick and his assistant had been indefatigable in their efforts to find some trace of Doctor Coelman and his sister, and to pick up some clue relative to the fate of Collin Graeme.

But not a clue, nor a trace of one, had been discovered. It was as if the three persons had disappeared off the face of the earth.

The detective had frankly confessed to himself and to his assistants that never in his experience had he found himself so entirely without resource; so entirely balked; so utterly nonplused in his endeavors.

He had visited Codman's office and searched it thoroughly—finding nothing. The office and its appointments were as if the doctor had only stepped out to make his usual round of calls, intending to return at any moment. His rent was paid far in advance, and his servant—the negro—remained on duty, stolid and as impenetrable as ever.

Among the effects of the office there was no clue of any kind, either to the doctor or to aid in finding Collin Graeme.

Even the doctor's practise had been turned over, temporarily, to a neighboring physician; and this doctor stated that Codman had gone away on a short vacation, from which he expected shortly to return.

Altogether, it was one of the most puzzling cases that had ever come under the care of the detective.

Ten-Ichi, that time when he had been sent by Chick to shadow the doctor, had succeeded in following him only a short distance, for, notwithstanding Ten-Ichi's abilities in that line, the wily physician had succeeded in throwing him entirely off the track, and Ten-Ichi had to admit that he was beaten.

And never had there been the slightest trace obtainable of Collin Graeme, from the moment he had turned away from the cigar-stand at the Hotel Astor in the company of Codman—or, rather, from the moment he had been seen to enter the automobile at the door of the hotel.

Only two things had the detective done other than has already been mentioned. He had cabled to Mr. and Mrs. Graeme, at Venice, a brief account of what had happened, so that they were expected to arrive in New York within the coming week; and he had called upon Margaret McLeod, at Elm Park—she who was Collin's fiancée, and he had taken Miss MacLeod entirely into his confidence.

There had been some encouragement in this, for Margaret had insisted that Collin could not be dead.

"If he were dead I would know of it," she insisted. "There has always been a bond of sympathy between Collin and me," she told him, "that at times is almost uncanny. It is thought-transference, perhaps, or telepathy. Call it what you will; but I will assure you, Mr. Carter, that at the very time of Collin's disappearance I knew that something had happened to him. Collin is not dead. He will be restored to us, and you will find him."

All this covers the week that had passed since the evening when the poisoned fruit was sent to Beechwood Hall; and now, at last, came the notification from Doctor Stag which, if one were to read between the lines, meant that Nancy had recovered from the trance into which she had been thrown by the drug or drugs administered by Doctor Codman.

It had been agreed between the doctor and the detective that the latter should keep entirely away from

the physician's house until he should be sent for; and now the message had come.

Impatience was not one of Nick Carter's faults; and yet on this particular morning the two hours which had to elapse before he could respond to the doctor's message seemed interminable. Promptly at half-past ten, however, he was at the door, and was as promptly admitted by the doctor in person.

"Come in here a moment, Nick," he said, drawing the detective into his private office.

"Has Nancy revived?" asked Nick, as soon as the door was closed behind them.

"Yes."

"In her right mind?"

"Perfectly so."

"Ill? Is she very weak?"

"No; she is, in fact, much stronger than when you last saw her. The poison which Codman administered last, and which induced the trance, has affected her as an antidote against the other poison that she had taken before. I fancy that the first was given to prepare the way for the other."

"The man is a perfect devil," said Nick, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"He is wonderful," admitted Doctor Stag, not without admiration. "I could almost forgive him for what he has done—if only he would open the way for me

to attain his knowledge of toxicology. He is a wonderful man."

"Can I see Nancy?"

"Certainly. That is why I sent for you."

"Let us go to her, then."

"In a moment. I have something to tell you first."

"Then tell it. What is it?"

"During all the time that Nancy has been in that trance she has been perfectly and entirely conscious of everything that has taken place near her. She heard and understood all that we said at her bedside at the time we found her, when we for a time supposed her to be dead. But she could not move a muscle, and you can imagine the horror of her position while she waited for us to decide if she were alive or dead. But all the time she says she did not lose confidence. She had faith in me and she had faith in you."

"It is a remarkable affair, doctor," said the detective.

"Remarkable, indeed! Unprecedented. But that is not all, Nick."

"What more?"

"She was, of course, too weak to resist Codman, at the time he made his appearance, after he had drugged the household with the poisoned fruit. She knew that there was no use in struggling and so she resigned herself to her fate. When the doctor held out a potion to her, and ordered her to swallow it,

she did so, and made no effort to resist him. She says herself that she had gotten beyond the possibility of resistance.

"As she was about to swallow it, Codman assured her that it would not injure her, but that, on the contrary, it would save her life; and as she swallowed it, he whispered to her that he loved her, and that was why he had decided to spare her life. But I will let her tell you the rest, in her own way. You will find it interesting."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Nick.

"Come, then," said the doctor. "We will go to her at once. Come."

Nancy was in a large room at the rear of the house, and thither Doctor Stag conducted the detective.

"I will leave you alone together," he said to them, then. "I have two or three important calls to make, which will occupy me about an hour. I will return at the end of that time."

Left alone together, the detective said:

"It is a terrible ordeal through which you have passed, Nancy."

"Terrible, indeed," she replied. "But it is all coming out all right now."

"The doctor tells me that you were perfectly conscious through it all."

"I was—from the very first."

"Tell me about it," said Nick.

"I realized that there was absolutely no use for me to struggle. I knew the instant when Doctor Codman entered the room that I was entirely in his power. He had something of the look of a fiend as he approached my bedside, but his face softened into a smile as he bent over me."

"What did he do then?"

"He addressed me by my first name—something that he had never presumed to do before; and he said:

" 'Nancy, I have not come here to injure you; I have come to save you. There are those who desire your death—they are people who are very near to you—in order that they may inherit your property. I am going to make them believe that you are dead, for a time, but I am going to save you.'

" 'Why?' I asked him.

" 'Because I love you,' he told me; and he saw me shrink away from him, for he added: 'I shall not impose myself upon you; but when you have learned all the truth you will have reason to thank me and to love me a little in return.'

"He directed me to straighten out at full length in the bed. Then he took my hands and crossed them over my bosom. Then, directing me to lie very still, he dropped two spoonfuls of a sweet-tasting mixture in my mouth."

She paused for an instant, and Nick waited in silence for her to proceed.

"Almost at the instant of swallowing the mixture," she continued, "I felt the effect of it. My limbs seemed to stiffen. I remember that I tried to move one of them, but I could not do so. My eyes were closed and I could not open them. I tried to put my hands down at my sides, but it was as if they were totally dead. I could not move them at all."

"And yet, all the time, you were entirely conscious?" asked the detective.

"Entirely so. Indeed, my sense of hearing seemed even more acute than ordinarily; but I could not turn my head or move a muscle in my whole body. I imagine that if one were imprisoned in a plaster-of-Paris cast, the sensation would be much the same as mine was then."

"What happened after that?"

"You must remember that I could not see; I could only hear."

"Yes."

"I think that the doctor watched me in silence for a considerable time, for there was no movement of any kind near me; but at last I heard him call to somebody who was evidently waiting outside the door.

"'You may come in, Jane,' he said. 'It is all right now.'

"Then I heard the rustle of a woman's garments as

she crossed the floor toward the bed, and I was somehow conscious of the fact that they were both standing beside me.

"'She swallowed the dose without the least resistance,' I heard the doctor say to his companion. 'She is asleep now; the same, outwardly, as if she were dead, and so perfectly does that drug of mine counterfeit death that I defy even the great Stag to discover that she is alive.'

"'And what do you propose to do now?' the woman asked him.

"'Do? Now? Nothing. Nothing at all,' he replied. 'I shall simply leave matters as they are.'

"And then he went on to explain that after a few hours the people in the house who had been drugged would recover consciousness and would be none the worse for their experiences.

"'They will find Nancy,' he said, 'and they will believe that she is dead. After that, all things will take the usual course in such cases. Stag will be called in, and will pronounce death due to heart failure. There will be a funeral. Nancy will be placed in the family mausoleum. I have a key to it, Jane. Nancy will recover consciousness the night of the tenth, and at that time I will be there, ready to rescue her; and after that all will be plain sailing for you and me.'"

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN WHO FIGHTS WITH POISONS.

"The night of the tenth," said Nick, half to himself. "That is to-night."

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"The mausoleum has been under espionage ever since the time when your body is supposed to have been placed there," continued the detective. "Part of the time I have been there on watch myself. To night I shall certainly be there in person."

"I have still more to tell you, Mr. Carter."

"What is it, Nancy?" asked Nick.

"While I was lying there, unable to move a muscle, and listening to their talk beside me, I prayed with all my strength that some reference would be made to Collin."

"Yes?" eagerly. "Was there?"

"My prayer was answered."

"Tell me how."

"The woman whom he addressed as Jane asked this question:

" 'What are you going to do with the brother? You can rest assured that his disappearance will be traced to you, and, if that happens, you won't have much

chance to enjoy the millions you expect to win by making this girl your wife. What of the brother?'

"'Don't you worry about the brother,' he replied. 'I will take care of him, and in a way that you little dream of.'

"'How?' she insisted. 'If he is alive, he will inherit half of the money. If you kill him, the murder will come out, and you will have to pay the penalty.'

"'Bah!' he said. 'I see that you do not know your own brother yet, Jane. Collin Graeme is at this moment alive, and, moreover, he is physically as well as he ever was. He is even wandering about the streets of the city now, and these fool detectives don't know it.'

"'What do you mean?' she asked him.

"'I mean what I say,' he retorted. 'I gave him a dose of one of my mixtures which made him forget who he is and where he lives. After that I stained his face and dyed his hair. I dressed him up to suit my own tastes, and then I turned him loose to subsist in the best way he can. He doesn't know what his name is. His own sister wouldn't know him if she should meet him on the street; and he wouldn't know her, either. I have been to see him every day, and now he has got a job; he is working—earning his living. What do you think of that?'

"He laughed heartily, as if he was vastly amused at the idea, and then he went on again:

" 'So you see, my dear, that no crime can be traced to me; no crime which I cannot overcome with a proper use of the millions I will have at my command; and when the proper time comes—that is, after Nancy is my wife, I will bend my energies to finding her brother. I will succeed, too, so she will still have something more to be grateful to me for.'

" 'But if you find him——'

" 'When I find him he will be demented. He will not be capable of handling his own property. I will apply to the courts to have his sister and myself appointed as guardians over him, and thus I will have the handling of his estates as well as his sister's. Don't you see how beautifully it works itself out? I stand as the savior of both.' "

"Was there anything more?" asked Nick.

"Yes. One thing more. It is about my stepfather."

"Tell me what it was?"

"The woman, Jane, said to him: 'How are you going to settle all this business with your partner, Angus? Tell me that.'

"The doctor laughed heartily at that; and then he said, snapping his fingers: 'I hold my good Angus in the hollow of my hand, Jane. In the first place, he is not Augus Graeme at all. His name is Angus MacMaster. He is no relation to the Graeme's. In the second place, he is entirely in my power, not only on

account of letters he has written to me, about this affair, but because of a crime he committed in Aberdeen, for which he is very badly wanted over in Scotland. He won't dare to peep.'

"'But the woman—the mother—is she in it, too?'

"'No,' he replied. 'She is only a vain fool.' It is terrible to speak so of my own mother, Mr. Carter, but, at least, it gives me the assurance that she has had no hand in this awful affair."

"Indeed it does. We must be thankful for that much."

"And that is all, Mr. Carter. Nothing else happened until you and the doctor came."

"Has the doctor told you that I cabled for your mother to come home?"

"Yes. Her heart will be broken, I fear."

"She will find you alive and well when she arrives, and I have made arrangements so that I will receive a message from quarantine to notify me of her arrival."

The detective left his chair.

"I must go now," he said. "I will not wait for the doctor."

"Why?"

"I am going to begin a new search for your brother. I think, with the clue you have given me, that I can find him with very little difficulty."

"Oh, I hope so! I hope so! And I hope that what-

ever that drug is that Doctor Codman gave him, that some way will be found to cure him of the effects of it."

"Have no fears about that. If Stag cannot do it, we will make Codman do it himself. Now that we know his hand we are no longer working in the dark."

"That is true."

"And to-night, at the mausoleum, I hope to capture him. If I do, I will get him red-handed, for I shall permit him to enter the mausoleum and open the coffin supposed to contain your dead body, before I strike. Good-by, Miss Graeme."

"It was Nancy a moment ago," she said, half-rising.

"All right," said Nick, smiling down at her. "Good-by, Nancy. Take good care of yourself, and rest assured that we will save your brother, and you, too."

"When shall I see you again?" she asked of him, clinging to the hand he had given her.

"As soon as I have anything to tell you. To-morrow morning, at all events."

He hurried away then, but he encountered the doctor at the door.

"What's your hurry, Nick?" he asked.

"Didn't Nancy tell you about her brother? What Codman said about him?"

"Yes."

"I am going to look for him."

"I am afraid, Nick, that it won't do any good," said the doctor.

"Why not?"

"I didn't take any stock in it. I think that Codman knew that Nancy could hear, and that he was talking for her benefit."

"I don't."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, go ahead," he said. "But first I want to ask you a question."

"All right. What is it?"

"Are you going to keep watch at the mausoleum to-night?"

"I certainly am."

"I want to go there with you."

"You do? Why?"

"Just because I do, that's all."

"It is hardly the place for a physician of your standing; and, besides, I wouldn't wonder at all if the Poison Doctor would put up a pretty stiff fight when he discovers that he is cornered."

"I think he will. That is one of the reasons why I wish to be there."

"Eh? What is that? I didn't know that you were a fighter, doctor."

"Look here, Nick. Has it occurred to you that if he does put up a fight, he won't fight in the same

manner or after the same methods that other people would employ?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is altogether too crafty a man to go to that place on the errand that will take him there to-night without being prepared for emergencies."

"Well, what of that? We will be prepared, too."

"But not in his way. Nick, don't you understand that he will fight with the weapons he knows best how to use?"

"What weapons are those, doctor?"

"Poisons."

"Wha-a-at!"

"I have said it, Nick."

"Say, doctor, you don't suppose that I am going to do as Nancy did, do you? Just lie back and open my mouth and swallow whatever he chooses to give me?"

"Hardly that, Nick."

"Then what are you getting at?"

"I hardly know myself; only that I feel assured in my own mind that he will employ some kind of poison in defending himself. He may shoot it at you out of a squirt-gun; he may throw it over you in the form of a powder; he may prick you with a pin that is tipped with it. I am sure that he will resort to some devilish act for your undoing."

The detective shook his head, but he was plainly impressed by what the doctor had said.

"The man who is genius enough to have invented a poison which will perform the miracle we have seen enacted in the case of Nancy, or who can do what you think he has done with her brother Collin, is a man to be feared, Nick."

"He is a man to be on your guard against, certainly."

"He will go to that mausoleum prepared for all emergencies, Nick."

"Very well; then we must make preparation against him."

"Exactly. That is why I wish to go with you. It is a good idea, in a case of that kind, to have a doctor on the spot. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do. All right, doctor. I will call for you."

"At what time?"

"About an hour before dark. I want to get to the mausoleum before night falls."

"Suppose he should elect to go there before it is dark?"

"He would find somebody awaiting him. There hasn't been a moment since that dummy was placed in the tomb when there has not been a guard there ready to receive Codman, if he should call."

"Who is there now?"

"Chick and Ten-Ichi. Patsy will go with me to-

night, so, with you, there will be five of us. Certainly that ought to be sufficient to overcome one man."

"You don't know that there will be only one. Indeed, I am inclined to think he may have several helpers along with him."

"It is possible. Anyhow, we will be prepared."

"Another question, Nick."

"Well?"

"Suppose that he has caught on to the fact that you are keeping a watch over the mausoleum, and, because of that, he should not show up at all?"

"Why, in that case, we will have to look somewhere else for him, that is all. But I don't think he has any such idea. We have been very careful. I don't think that he is on to the game at all."

"You will call for me, then?"

"Yes; an hour before dark."

"Where are you going first, in your search for Collin Graeme, Nick?"

"I am going to the Old Bowery Mission, doctor. They would have spotted a man like Collin Graeme before this time; and that is precisely the part of the city where Codman would have turned him loose, as he expressed it. That mission does a great work, doctor. It is all done silently—but it counts."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE COLLIN GRAEME WAS FOUND.

When Nick Carter parted with Doctor Stag he hurried at once to the Old Bowery Mission, for he was not only well known there for the assistance he had given them from time to time, but he knew that a half-demented stranger, in the person of a young and refined-looking man, wandering around that part of the city, would have been quickly discovered by the good people who conducted it.

He addressed himself to the young clergyman who was in charge of the place.

"I wish to inquire about a young man who, I believe, has come under your influence within the last twelve or thirteen days," he said. "Do you recall such a one?"

"Yes," replied the clergyman, smiling. "There are several."

"This young man about whom I inquire," continued the detective, "is the unfortunate victim of a conspiracy, the particulars of which would seem almost incredible if I should explain them to you; but I can tell you this much:

"He has fallen into the power of an unscrupulous physician, who has succeeded in drugging him into a

quasi-insensibility. That is, he has made him forget his own identity. Also, I am informed that the doctor has succeeded in disguising his victim in such a manner that it is doubtful if his best friends would recognize him, if he should happen to meet them on the street.

"I have here a photograph of him as he should appear naturally. You see that he is fair, with blue eyes, and is rather a handsome fellow. He is rather undersized, as far as his stature is concerned; but he is compactly built.

"My information concerning him suggests that his skin has been stained to a darker hue, and that his hair has been dyed. More than that I do not know, save that I have been told that he has succeeded in obtaining some sort of employment. Now, my dear sir, do you think you can aid me in the search for him?"

The young clergyman was very thoughtful while he studied the photograph he held in his hand.

"Yes," he said at last, half to himself. "There is a youth whom I have in mind who might be the one. How old is this young man, Mr. Carter?"

"Twenty-one this coming December."

"There is a young man by the name of Collins—I have never heard his given name; my impression is that he refused to give it, and possibly it was because he could not remember it—who was brought here

about a week ago by one of our assistants on the streets. He might be the one."

"Collins, you say? The young man I seek is named Collin Graeme. Where can I find the young man to whom you refer?"

"I don't know. We have lost all trace of him since three days ago."

"Where was he at that time?"

"He had secured employment, through some other influenec than ours, with the street-cleaning department; but he is not there now."

"You are positive about that, I suppose?"

"Yes; because we have searched for him."

"You do not know where he went from there?"

"We have no idea whatever."

"Who was his immediate boss? Do you know that?"

"A man name Pat Brennan."

"Where can I find *him?*"

The clergyman referred to a book upon his desk, and replied:

"He has charge of the gang now working in Center Street. He makes his headquarters at the corner of Pearl. I think you will find him there now."

The detective thanked his informant and hurried away; nor did he experience any difficulty in finding Brennan.

"Brennan," he said, "I am Nick Carter. I——"

"The devil ye are! Sure, it's glad to know ye I am. What can I be after doin' f'r ye, Mr. Carter?" the man interrupted him.

"You had, until three or four days ago, a young man working for you by the name of Collins. I want to find that young man."

"We know all our men only by numbers," replied Brennan, wrinkling his brows. "Mebbe, though, I can help ye. What kind of a looking chap is he?"

"Short, thick-set, handsome of feature, twenty years old, skin stained to a dark-brown, blue eyes, hair dyed black; a gentleman by birth and training; has been made dotty by drugs until he has forgotten who he is, and——"

"Hold on! Hold on, there! I know him. Wait." Then he raised his voice and added: "Here, Finnigan! You! Come here! What became of six-thirty-nine? Where is he?"

"I fired him, Brennan. He was no good. Couldn't work. Didn't know how, or wouldn't."

"Where did he go? De ye know that?"

"Wan of the boys saw him barkin' f'r a Punch-and-Judy show on the Coney Island Bowery, only yesterday. He told me about it. Why? What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"This gentleman wants to find him, that's all," replied Brennan.

"Wait, Finnigan," said the detective, as the assist-

ant foreman was turning away. "Did you, while he was here, ever see him spoken to by any person outside your gang?"

"Yes, sir; twice. A chap with a pointed black beard and beady eyes."

"Thank you. That is all. Thank you also, Brennan."

The detective hurried to a telephone and ordered his automobile brought to him; and half an hour later he was crossing Brooklyn Bridge. Within an hour from that time he was at Coney Island.

Any person who is familiar with Coney Island Bowery knows what a maze, what a labyrinth it is. To search for a person there is like looking for the proverbial needle in the stack of hay; nor was this the best hour in the day to search for one who was "barking" for a show down there. The crowd had not yet arrived; there was no need, until later in the day, for the barkers.

Nick traversed the length of that remarkable thoroughfare twice and stopped at the "Punch-and-Judy" shows he found there; but he obtained not the slightest information at any of them; there were three, and at all of them he was assured that their barkers had been in their employ all season.

The detective returned to his starting-place, determined that on the next trip he would thoroughly canvass every place throughout the entire length of the

planked walk, and he was on the point of starting when he stopped suddenly and drew quickly out of sight from one person he had seen.

"Jane Gore!" he said to himself. "Codman's sister. Good! If I watch her, she will take me to Collin Graeme;" and he stepped behind a screen, where he rapidly and dexterously adjusted an iron-gray wig and a bunch of gray whiskers to his chin. Then he stepped outside again, and calmly pursued Jane Gore, who was now walking rapidly down the narrow street.

Presently she slowed down, then stopped, and seemed to be studying her surroundings with some care, as if she were not quite certain where she was to go.

But the question she would have asked was answered for her in an unexpected manner, for at that instant, out of the very doorway before which she was standing, a blue-eyed but swarthy-skinned young man, poorly dressed, and whose clothing hung loosely upon an emaciated physique, appeared before her, and she stepped forward hastily and spoke to him.

"Great Scott!" thought the detective. "Who would have supposed that Codman could have wrought such a change as that! No wonder that he felt no fear that Collin would be recognized."

The two appeared to be conversing earnestly together. and Nick was for a moment in doubt as to

the best course to pursue. His impulse was to arrest them both, then and there; but after a moment he thought better of it.

"If I should arrest Jane Gore now, I might frighten the doctor away from his intended visit to the mausoleum to-night. It is possible that he is even somewhere near at this moment; but, even if he is not, he would be frightened if his sister did not return to him. It is plain that she has come here at his bidding. I think——"

He paused suddenly. A man, who bore not the least resemblance to Doctor Codman, had approached the pair and was now talking with them.

"By Jove!" thought Nick. "If that is Codman, he's a crackajack! As keen as I am at penetrating disguises, he could have passed me on the street anywhere."

Whatever the nature of the business might have been that the two had with Collin Graeme, it was quickly transacted, for, after five minutes' earnest talk, they turned away, and as they did so Nick saw the man press a bill into Graeme's hand.

"I wish that Chick or one of the boys were here with me now." murmured the detective, as he watched them go. "I would like to shadow those two. But my duty is here. I have found Collin Graeme; I must not lose sight of him again."

He watched the two until they had disappeared,

and then he stepped forward quickly and placed one hand lightly upon the shoulder of young Graeme.

The young man wheeled upon him like lightning, and, before Nick realized what he was doing, he struck out so savagely that the detective barely escaped receiving a severe blow squarely in the face. But he managed to parry it, and at the same instant he caught Graeme by both arms and held him as if he were in a vise.

But the young man continued to struggle; and, as he did so, three men ran out from the doorway through which he appeared, and they would have attacked the detective then and there had he not called out to them:

"I am an officer. If you attempt to interfere with me, I'll make it hot for the whole outfit."

Then he devoted his entire attention to Graeme, who had become suddenly quiet.

"Collin Graeme," said Nick, in a low, earnest tone, "don't you know your own name? Do you not know who you are, Collin Graeme?"

The name seemed to touch a cord of memory; he blinked at Nick, and smiled wanly:

"Your sister Nancy is waiting for you," continued Nick. "Nancy. Your sister. Collin Graeme's sister. You are Collin Graeme, and Nannie——"

The young man shivered in the detective's grasp, and Nick could hear him murmur to himself:

"Nannie! Nannie! Sister! Collin Graeme! Collin Graeme's sister Nannie!" and then suddenly he demanded: "Who are you? What do you know about Collin Graeme—and Nannie? Nannie is dead, I tell you."

"No, Collin," said Nick kindly. "Nannie is alive. She is waiting for you. I am going to take you to her. She wants you. She needs you. Don't you remember that she was very ill, and that you came from college—from Hamilton College, to see her? Nannie—your sister Nannie, is alive and well, and she is waiting for you."

"That man said she was dead. I don't know who he is, only that I have seen him somewhere. He has been good to me. He said that Nannie died, and that I would be arrested if I was not careful. That is why I struck at you. He said that somebody might come after me, but that I would be put in prison if I allowed myself to be taken. Is that true?"

"No. It is a lie, Collin. Nannie sent me to get you, and to take you to her. Nannie would not put you in prison, would she?"

"No. No. Nannie wouldn't do that. No."

"Then you will go with me to find her? Now? I have an automobile here. We will go in that to find Nannie. Will you go with me?"

"Yes," he said. "I will go with you. Yes. I will go to find Nannie, for I believe you. You see, there

is something the matter with my head. I cannot remember things. I had forgotten my name until you reminded me of it. But I know it now. Yes; I will go with you to find Nannie."

"Come, then," said Nick. "We will go at once;" and he led him unresistingly away.

CHAPTER IX.

A FIGHT WITH A FIEND.

The mausoleum erected by the grandfather of Collin and Nancy Graeme is an imposing edifice of its kind. It cost a fortune to build it, and if a tomb can be said to be palatial in its appointments, this one was and is.

Moreover, it stands very much by itself, for at the time it was built a large section of the cemetery was purchased for the site, in order that it might stand alone—in order that the other silent inhabitants of the locality might not intrude upon it.

There is a grove of old-growth trees half-surrounding it, and there is a high and dense hedge there also.

The approach to the mausoleum is along a pathway through this hedge; a pathway which leads to a crescent-shaped portico supported by Corinthian pillars. Beyond, in the center, is the massive door of wrought-iron bars, and inside the mausoleum resembles, more than anything else, a superbly appointed chapel.

It was to the grove behind the mausoleum, deep among the trees, that Nick Carter conducted Doctor Stag, just before dark. Ten-Ichi was with them; Chick and Patsy were already there.

"We will be secure from observation here," said the detective, as he led them among the trees. "We can see without being seen, for to-night will be almost as bright as day, with the moonlight."

"What time do you figure it out that Codman will show up?" asked the doctor.

"At almost any moment after the cemetery closes for the night. He would not make any effort to visit this place before that; but after it, if he has found a secret way into the cemetery—as he undoubtedly has done—he could approach this place safely at almost any moment."

"It certainly is sufficiently isolated," said the physician.

"It could not be better for his purposes. And now, if you please, we will all remain absolutely still. No talking whatever."

"One word more before we shut up," said the doctor. "I saw you talking rather earnestly with the superintendent back at the gate. Is he wise to what is going on?"

"Certainly. No impediment will be put in the way of Codman's entrance to the cemetery, even if he should be seen. I have arranged for that."

"You are a long-headed chap, Nick."

"I have to be so in my business, doctor. Now, quiet, if you please."

From that time on not a word was spoken between

the five men who waited there for the appearance of Doctor Codman. The twilight deepened into darkness, and for an hour it was intensely dark; but after that the glow of the moon not yet risen, but near the horizon, dispelled some of the gloom.

It was half-past ten o'clock precisely when Nick, who had just glanced at his watch, saw the figure of a man suddenly appear in the pathway where it cuts through the hedge in front of the mausoleum.

For a full minute the man stood there silently, as if he were reconnoitering; and then moved slowly and silently forward toward the marble building. As he did so, four other forms came out of the shadows behind the hedge and crept along silently after him, and in this manner they glided up the path and passed beyond the Corinthian columns of the mausoleum.

"It will be five against five," said Nick, in a whisper to his companions. "Come!"

He crept forward silently, and they followed him; and, fortunately, the shadows cast by the trees behind them protected them until they were close beside the building.

Then it was that Nick held up his hand as a signal for the others to wait while he crept forward alone; and in a moment he had secured a position where he could see all that was taking place beyond those marble columns.

Codman had lighted a lantern, which was provided

with a powerful reflector, and, in the glare of it, with his pointed beard and his sinister face, he looked the very demon he had already proved himself to be. His four companions were grouped around him, and he was evidently giving them their final instructions, for they were all talking earnestly together.

After a moment Codman produced a key, and with it quickly unfastened the heavy grated door of the mausoleum; in another moment all five of them had passed inside.

Nick signaled to his companions, and they all moved forward again; and presently they raised themselves erect just outside the door and in a position from whence they could plainly see all that was taking place inside the tomb.

The casket in which the body of Nancy was supposed to be encased was resting upon a sort of altar of marble, in the very center of the mausoleum, and Codman was already busily engaged in removing the screws from the lid, while the others stood around, silently observing him.

Nick and his friends crept closer still to the door. They stood ready, when the proper moment should arrive, to dash inside—and that moment was now near at hand.

Patsy had received instructions from his chief to hang back behind the others when the attack should be made, and to pull the door shut behind him, for it

was provided with a spring-lock, and, once closed, none of the grave-robbers could escape—for Nick had provided himself with an extra key.

Every nerve was at a tension; every muscle was strained and ready for the coming combat, as they awaited the signal for the attack.

Presently they heard Codman utter an exclamation of pleasure as he removed the last screw.

"There!" he said.

Nick saw him bend forward to lift the lid from its place, and he motioned to his companions to be ready. Then the lid was lifted, and for one instant there was utter silence. And then——

The coffin-lid crashed to the floor of the mausoleum; a volley of curses from Codman exploded upon the air.

He started back with staring eyes, evidently unable, for a moment, to believe the evidence of his own senses.

In the meantime, Nick and his followers had passed silently inside the building, and Patsy pulled the door shut after them.

It was the click of the lock as it snapped into place that aroused Codman and his men, and the former turned with a snarl of rage just at the instant when Nick Carter leaped forward and grappled with him; just at the instant when Doctor Stag, Chick, Ten-Ichi.

and Patsy also started forward, each having selected his adversary.

Nick had reached a point within ten feet of Codman before the attack was made, and one leap brought him within reach of the man so that he seized him around the body in a manner that is known to wrestlers as the "back-hold."

It had never once occurred to Nick Carter that he might encounter his match in strength and science in Doctor Codman. The tall, slight figure of the Poison Doctor did not suggest that he possessed the extraordinary strength that was his.

But when Nick grappled with him and sought to bend his back and throw him to the marble floor, it was as if he had seized upon a rod of steel; the doctor's back would not bend. Indeed, for the first half-minute it seemed to Nick that his own back must give way under the awful pressure which Codman put upon it; and they stood there, two giants of strength, so evenly matched that neither appeared to obtain the slightest advantage over the other.

They swayed and strained against each other. Their faces were close together; their chins rested upon each other's shoulders; their hands were locked behind each other's backs.

Nick, however, had one advantage. He had the under hold, and that gave him a purchase which the doctor could not obtain.

The detective saw that he could not hope to bend Codman's back, so he resorted to another means of overcoming his enemy. He lifted him bodily from his feet and sought to throw him in that manner; but every time he tried it, Codman landed flatly on his feet again, and the struggle was renewed.

Nick presently came to the conclusion that he could not hope to overcome the doctor by his present methods, and he decided to resort to stratagem. There was a risk in attempting it, for it might fail, and in that case the doctor would have a decided advantage.

Suddenly he released his hold around the doctor's back, and, with a lightninglike motion, he delivered a short-arm blow with the second knuckle of his middle finger. It landed where he had intended it should —that is, directly under the physician's ear; and the terrific force of it seemed instantly to paralyze Codman's entire body.

His arms dropped from the detective's back; his knees partly gave way beneath him; and in that instant Nick seized him again, raised him from the floor bodily, and dashed him down with terrible force upon and against the marble floor, where he remained a quivering mass of inanimate flesh.

And then Nick turned to the others; and just in time to see that Doctor Stag had been overcome, and that his adversary was in the act of raising a knife with which to stab him. But a blow from Nick Car-

ter's fist put the fellow out before the weapon could fall, and Nick saw then that each of his assistants were engaged in quietly handcuffing their fallen foes.

The fight was over. Codman and his confederates were captured, and a messenger was sent hastily to the superintendent's office. A patrol-wagon took the prisoners away.

Nick, feeling that his duty was done, entered his automobile with Doctor Stag and his assistants, and started for home, after assuring the policeman in charge that officers from the city would be sent after the prisoners in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

THE POISONER'S DESPERATE ACT.

It was half-past eleven when the patrol-wagon drew up in front of the Westchester police-station. Each of the prisoners was securely handcuffed, and to make assurance doubly sure, the handcuffs were so arranged that the prisoners were chained together in one continuous line, the Poison Doctor being in the middle, where it was believed he would be most secure. There were two policemen on the front step of the wagon, a third on the step at the rear, and a fourth inside with the prisoners.

When the wagon halted in front of the station-house, the policemen on the front seat got down and went around to the rear of the wagon, where the third officer was awaiting them. At the same time two more officers appeared at the front door of the station-house and stood there idly, waiting to have a look at the prisoners.

Then the prisoners filed slowly out of the wagon, with the remaining officer behind them, and in this way they were led inside the station-house.

There was a cold smile on Doctor Codman's face when he confronted the sergeant at the desk; a smile

in which his eyes took no part, and which showed his white and gleaming teeth menacingly.

The five prisoners were directly in front of the desk, against the iron rail that was there—and Codman was in the center.

Directly behind them, perhaps five feet to the rear and lined up in almost the same position as the prisoners, were five policemen; the four who had been with the patrol-wagon and one of those who had stood in the doorway as it approached the station-house; the sixth was the sergeant who was now behind the desk.

There was a short interval of utter silence in the room, during which the sergeant studied the faces of the prisoners. Then he drew the blotter toward him, opened it, and began with the first one on his left.

"What is your——" he commenced; but he got no further than that, for at that instant the shackles fell from Codman's wrists as if they had never been fastened there at all.

He started backward, and wheeled in his tracks as the irons fell from him, and as he did so he drew something—it was a large rubber bulb—from his coat-pocket, and, waving it around his head and pressing it with all the strength in his hand, the room instantly became filled with a fine spray which seemed to penetrate to every corner of it at once.

The officers who saw Codman's first move, and who attempted to seize upon him or to get their own

weapons into play, were instantly blinded by that terrible spray. Their hands flew to their eyes, and they cried out, and cursed and screamed in agony.

By whirling as he did, the doctor sent the terrible spray into every part of the room, and not only the officers who stood behind him received the effects of it, but also the sergeant behind the desk, and even the poisoner's companions in crime.

In their agony they screamed aloud; many of them fell to the floor, where they writhed and twisted in exquisite torture.

If they could have seen Codman—which they could not—they would have noticed that, the instant when he raised that bulb on high and pressed it, he crouched low down, and that he not only closed his own eyes tightly, but he pressed his left hand over his nostrils and mouth.

Then, as the men fell around him like fleas, he leaped away from them toward the door.

With a bound he was through it and into the street. With another he was beside the patrol-wagon. A third took him to the driver's seat, where he seized reins and whip, and in another instant he was dashing down the street with the horses in a hard run; and there wasn't anybody who saw that wagon pass who thought to stop it or hinder it, for was it not the police patrol-wagon? It was nothing strange to see that dashing through the streets at a mad gallop.

It may as well be explained here that on the following morning the patrol-wagon was discovered at the side of the road three miles out of town, the horses tied to a tree.

At the station-house, after the doctor had sprayed that terrible poison around the room in order to make good his escape, nobody thought of anything but his own agony for a long time.

It was as if each one there had been seared across the eyeballs with white-hot irons; as if the eyes themselves had been torn from their sockets; and the effect of the poison upon their nostrils, and lips, and throats was almost as agonizing. Nobody could speak. They could only cough, and scream, and groan, and writhe in agony on the floor.

And the men who had been the companions of Codman, the men who were arrested with him, and who were, therefore, accessories to the crimes he had committed, were in every bit as bad a plight as were the policemen. There were four of them now, each two being still handcuffed together. And they had no thought of making any attempt to escape. Their agony was too intense. They were suffering too horribly.

In the midst of this unprecedented scene a passing milkman stopped at the door, and ran inside to see what was the matter.

No one could tell him; none could even see him;

but he was a man of resource, and he hurried back to his wagon and brought inside the station-house one of his cans of milk.

There was a wash-bowl in one corner of the room. He filled the bowl with the milk and soaked the towel in it, and with that he washed the eyes of the suffering men; he forced them to drink large quantities of the milk, and gradually they recovered themselves, until at last, after more than an hour had elapsed since the attack, they were enabled to see each other and to talk in broken sentences about the terrible occurrence.

But Codman had escaped. He had gone, and taken the patrol-wagon and the horses with him.

Nobody had seen him go; there had been nobody in the street at the time; they could not even determine which direction he had taken.

It was half-past eleven when the patrol-wagon drew up in front of the door of the station-house with the prisoners; it was half-past one in the morning before the sergeant and his five men were in any condition to realize what had happened.

CHAPTER XI.

A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL AT LARGE.

Nick Carter was seated in the library of his own house. Opposite him, at the other side of the table, was the police sergeant from whom Doctor Codman had made his escape in such a dramatic manner; and the sergeant had just finished reciting the history of that incident. It was half-past one o'clock of the day following.

"You haven't told me how Codman managed to rid himself of the handcuffs, sergeant," said the detective. "How was it?"

"You can search me, Mr. Carter. I don't know."

"But you examined the handcuffs, didn't you?"

"Sure thing."

"Did the fellow slip his hands through them, do you think?"

"No; they were unlocked."

"Unlocked? How was that? I snapped them onto him myself. I know they were secure when I placed them there. Who unlocked them?"

"He must have done it himself, sir."

"But how could he have done that? He was handcuffed to the man on either side of him, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Did any stranger have an opportunity to get near him, sergeant?"

"No; there wasn't anybody near him at all. I can swear to that."

"Then how could he have done it?"

"I don't know, unless he had a key in one of his pockets."

"But even if he had such a key, how could he make use of it, handcuffed as he was?"

"I give it up, Mr. Carter. Hanged if I know, if you'll excuse me for speaking rather forcibly."

"I think you are excusable under the circumstances."

"Have you questioned the other prisoners?"

"Yes."

"What do they have to say about it?"

"Not a word. If they know anything about it, they won't tell."

"What do they have to say about the doctor? Aren't they mad about being deserted in such a manner?"

"You should hear them curse him, that's all!"

"And yet they pretend that they do not know how he rid himself of the handcuffs?"

"Yes."

"Then they lie about it, that's all there is about that. The doctor could not have accomplished the feat without assistance from at least one of them, and that assistance must have been rendered while they

were inside the patrol-wagon on their way to the station-house."

"Well, I can't get anything out of them."

"Who was the officer who was inside the wagon with them?"

"Tomlison."

"Is he entirely trustworthy?"

"You bet your life he is!"

"He isn't a man who would accept a bribe, eh?"

"No, siree!"

"And the officer on the step outside. What of him?"

"I'll answer for every one of my men, Mr. Carter."

"Well, I don't know as it makes much difference how he escaped; the point is that he did escape, and is now at large."

"That's it."

"And we have got to get him back again somehow."

"I'd like to get my fingers onto him just once!" said the sergeant angrily.

The detective laughed aloud.

"Do you know what would happen, sergeant, if you should get your fingers onto him just once, as you express it?"

"Yes; I'd choke the life out of the scoundrel."

"On the contrary, sergeant, he would throw you over his [illegible] as easily as if you were a two-year-old

child. I have tackled a good many powerful men in my time, but he is without exception the strongest man I was ever up against."

"Is that true, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly true."

"Is he as strong as you are?"

"Yes; every bit. I am not sure that he is not even stronger than I am."

"Great Scott!"

"He is a very dangerous man, sergeant."

"I should say so."

"Tell me again just how he did that act of throwing something into your eyes," said the detective.

"I don't believe that I can make it any plainer than I have already, Mr. Carter. It all happened so quickly that there wasn't time to tell just how it was done. All I know is that, just as I was about to put the usual questions, he stepped back all at once and wheeled round and round just as if he was on a pivot. At the same time he raised his hand aloft, and there was something in it that looked like a big rubber ball. I was reaching under my desk for my revolver when I was struck down just the same as if I had received a blow in the face, and such agony as I experienced then I never endured before, and I hope I'll never have to again."

"Blinded you, eh?"

"Blinded, and choked, and burned. It was awful."

"You don't know what happened after that?"

"I don't know a thing after that. Neither do any of the others. Talk about torture! It wasn't until that milkman came and swabbed our eyes with milk and gave us some to drink, that I could even think."

"Were the other prisoners as bad off as you officers?"

"Every bit. Yes."

"And not one of them will say a word about the escape?"

"They claim that they know nothing about it—and I think they tell the truth."

"What do they say about the doctor himself?"

"Every one of them swears that he will kill the doctor on sight."

"Humph! What do they say about their association with him?"

"They claim that they never saw him in their lives until three days before the expedition to the cemetery."

"Do you believe that, also?"

"I don't know whether I do, or not. They tell a pretty straight story."

"What is the story?"

"That Codman hunted them up where they hang out—they wouldn't tell me where that is—and offered them fifty dollars each if they would go with him to the cemetery, at the same time explaining that

he had dreamed that the young lady had been buried alive, and that it had affected him so that he wanted to make sure about it. He told them that if she should happen to be alive, they would be instrumental in saving her life, and that if she were indeed dead, they would leave her there, and there would be no harm done. He gave each of them twenty-five in advance, and they each had the twenty-five, which seems to bear out the story; don't you think so?"

"It would seem so, yes."

"They are all crooks, though. One can see that with half an eye."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that. I'll tell you what you had better do, sergeant."

"Well, sir?"

"When you leave here, go down to headquarters and take a look through the picture-gallery. See if you can find any of them there. If you do so, let me know."

"I'll do that. But you'll have a chance to do it yourself. They are in the city now."

"True. That is so. I had forgotten it."

"Officers came from headquarters after them early this morning."

"Quite right. I'll see the inspector about it, sergeant. It looks to me as if the matter was out of your hands now."

"All except my responsibility for the escape, sir."

"I don't think you need let that worry you. I don't think anything will be done about it. You could hardly have been on your guard against such a hellish method of escape as he employed. The mistake was more mine than yours. I should have gone through his pockets before I turned him over to your men, for I had been warned that he would fight with poisons if he got half a chance. I'll stand by you sergeant, if I can."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter."

"It will be a warning to you, sergeant, never to be off your guard when you are dealing with unknown criminals."

"You bet it will."

"You found the patrol-wagon, you say?"

"Yes; three miles out of town, on the road toward the city."

"I wonder if Codman had the gall to go to his office?" murmured Nick musingly.

"What's that, sir?" asked the sergeant.

"I was wondering if Doctor Codman would have dared to go to his office," replied the detective.

"Maybe he's got a telephone. Why don't you call him up and find out?"

The detective laughed aloud. Then he said:

"That isn't at all a bad idea of yours, sergeant. I think I'll try it."

"Maybe he'll answer it himself," said the sergeant, with a grin.

"It would be just like him to do so if he is there," said the detective. "But even if he has been there, I hardly think that he would be there now. He wouldn't consider it safe to hang around his office too long a time, although he might dare to go there as soon as he arrived in the city."

"Try it, anyhow, Mr. Carter, and see. Do it while I am here, won't you?"

"Yes. Shove that receiver over to me."

The detective glanced through the directory and found the requisite number. Then he took the receiver from the hook and asked for it.

There was a considerable wait after that, but at last the detective heard a faint reply from the other end of the wire.

"Hello!" he called. "Is this the office of Doctor Codman?"

"Yes," came the instant reply.

"Is the doctor in?" asked Nick, in his most dulcet tones.

"Yes," was the astounding response. "Who is it who wishes to speak to him?"

"Tell him that one of his patients wishes to speak to him at once, please."

"Very good, sir. What name?"

"Oh, never mind the name," said Nick. "Ask him to come to the phone."

"You will have to give me your name, sir," came the reply again.

"All right. Tell him Mr. Hamilton."

"Very good, sir. Hold the wire."

There was another short wait after that, and then a voice, which was unmistakably the doctor's, shouted over the wire:

"Hello, there! What do you want?"

For an interval—so short that the hesitation was not noticeable—the detective was too greatly surprised to reply. Then he said:

"Am I speaking to Doctor Codman?"

Nick could hear the man at the opposite end of the wire chuckle; and then the reply came plainly:

"Yes, this is Doctor Codman; and unless I am greatly mistaken, you are Nick Carter; eh?"

"Quite right," replied Nick, for the humor of the situation appealed to him instantly, and he was also resolved to make the most of his opportunity. "How are you this morning, doctor?"

"Fine; never better. I swallowed a little bit of that paralyzer of mine, but I have gotten rid of it. What do you think of it, Carter?"

"It certainly did the business," replied Nick.

"It sure did. Why did you call me up?"

"Just to find out if you had been there; that is all."

"You didn't expect to find out that I was here now, did you?"

"No; I will confess that I did not."

"Well, you see I had to come here for a little while, and I thonght this morning would be as good a time as any."

"Without a doubt."

"Is that all you wanted, Carter?"

"No; not quite," said Nick, laughing.

"What else? It seems to amuse you whatever it is."

"I would like to make an appointment with you for some time later in the day."

"Oh! would you, indeed? Where?"

"How would police headquarters do, doctor?"

"It wouldn't suit me at all, Carter—just now. You would be inclined to make altogether too much of me if I should go there."

"I am afraid that we would."

"But I haven't any objections to meeting you, if you would really like to chat with me."

"Do you mean that, doctor?"

"I certainly do, Carter."

"You will meet me some time this afternoon?"

"Yes—under conditions."

"What are the conditions?"

"That you give me your word of honor that you will go to the place alone; that you will not attemp

to capture me or to harm me in any way, and that when we part you will give me three hours afterward before you tell of the meeting, or attempt to have me followed. One thing more, too."

"What is that?"

"From this moment you are not to mention to anybody that you know anything at all about me, and you are not to make any effort leading to my ultimate capture, such as an attempt to shadow, and all that, until three hours after our meeting. For myself, I will agree to the same conditions. What do you say?"

"You seem to wish to see me even more than I desire to see you," replied Nick.

"Frankly, I do."

"You have not stipulated that I should go to the place of meeting unarmed."

"No; I have disarmed you by your promise—when you have made it."

"You would accept my word for it, then?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, I agree."

"You will not communicate with anybody, at headquarters or elsewhere, in the meantime?"

"No."

"You will go to the place of meeting alone?"

"Yes."

"You will make no attempt to capture or to injure me in any way?"

"No."

"You will give me the three hours after the meeting?"

"Yes."

"And you will not direct any person to go to that place of meeting or near to it, to observe the meeting, or to attempt to follow me when I leave there?"

"No. I will play fair."

"Are you alone now, where you are talking?"

"No."

"Who is with you?"

"The sergeant who was about to question you last night, when you threw dust in his eyes."

"Indeed! Then he has heard one side of this conversation."

"Yes."

"Do you think he has understood it?"

"He would be worse than a fool if he did not."

"Will you answer for him?"

"Yes."

"On your word of honor?"

"Yes."

"Then it's a go."

"Wait a minute," said Nick. "There is one thing that I want you to understand."

"What is it?"

"I am absolved from all of these promises if you make any overt act against me."

"Sure. That's all right. I promise you everything that you have promised me, and there is one thing, Carter, that I want you to understand."

"What is that?"

"I always keep my word."

"Really?"

"I always keep my word. I am a criminal from choice, but all the same I keep my word. If I make you a promise, I keep it. I rather like you, Carter. I wish you were my friend instead of my enemy."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for that."

"Oh, you neeedn't take the trouble. You are the strongest man I was ever pitted against."

"I might return that compliment."

"But I am even stronger than you are."

"Possibly. What about that place of meeting? Where shall it be?"

"You have an automobile, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Call for me here, at this house, at seven-thirty this evening."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Well, look here, I will do that, all right; but you must understand that you run a risk in meeting me there."

"I understand that, all right."

"If your house should be watched, as it probably

will be—in fact, I don't know why it is not under surveillance now—and if you should be taken you must understand that it will be through no fault of mine. I have given you my word and I will keep it."

"I understand that, all right, too."

"Don't blame me for anything that might happen."

"I won't."

"Then I am to go for you, at Stoneyhedge Court, at half-past seven o'clock this evining?"

"Precisely."

"I'll be there, doctor."

"Agreed. When you approach the court, will you take care to do it so that the steering-wheel of your car will be next to the curb?"

"Yes."

"And as you stop the machine, will you move ove. so that I can get in under the wheel?"

"Why is that?"

."Because for the purposes of perfect safety I wish to run the car for the first half-hour."

"I don't know about agreeing to that, doctor."

"It must be that, or nothing. Will you do it? I won't wreck the machine, or hurt it or you; and if I am operating the car you will have a decided advantage over me in case I should have any inclination to break my word not to harm you—which, I as

sure you again, will not be the case. But I know that you do not trust me as I trust you."

"Very well. I will do all that you ask."

"Then it is all agreed?"

"Yes."

"Good-by till half-past seven."

"Good-by."

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE THE SERGEANT GOT LEFT.

The detective returned the receiver to the hook after this most extraordinary conversation, and turned again to the sergeant.

"Well, sergeant," he asked, "what do you think of it?"

"I will confess, Mr. Carter, that I do not understand it at all."

"It is simply that Doctor Codman and I have declared a truce which is to endure until three hours after I have parted with him at the meeting which is to take place between us to-night."

"I wouldn't go to that meeting under the conditions you have made with him, if you were to offer me ten thousand dollars to do it, Mr. Carter; and if you will pardon plain speaking, I think you are a fool to do it yourself."

"Possibly. That is a reply to the first part of your statement. To the second, I have only to say that I do not agree with you."

"Why not? What can you accomplish by meeting him?"

"Possibly nothing. Perhaps a great deal."

"But what?"

"Sergeant, all criminals of the educated sort are egoists. It is the rock upon which they always founder in the end."

"What of that?"

"Codman has arranged this meeting for tonight in order to pit his wits against mine. I am glad to meet him under those circumstances, and to let him go again, for several reasons, of which the chief one is that it will give me an opportunity to study him; and that is an opportunity I have never enjoyed. He is almost unknown to me. He is a brilliant man, mentally. But all the same, he is an egoist. Not an egotist, mind you."

"I don't understand it at all, Mr. Carter."

"Listen. We are to ride together in my car. Where, I do not know, and I care less. But I will have an opportunity to talk with this great criminal, and before we part I will know a great deal more about him than he thinks, or than I could learn in another month, under ordinary conditions. In a word, I believe that the three hours' liberty I give him after we will part will shorten the time to his capture by days, if not by weeks."

"I only hope that it will."

"And now, sergeant, you must give me your word of honor that you will not mention a word about this to a living soul."

"I certainly will not, sir," declared the sergeant.

For a moment after this surprising response to his request, the detective sat perfectly still, regarding the sergeant with a smile that had in it a certain element of suggestiveness which would have rendered the policeman uneasy had he known Nick Carter better.

"Did I understand you correctly, sergeant?" he asked calmly.

"Perfectly, Mr. Carter."

"You will not keep silent about this affair until I give you liberty of speech?"

"No, sir, I won't. I consider it my duty as an——"

"Never mind what you consider to be your duty. The point is that you refuse my request."

"Flat. Yes, sir."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said, "I don't suppose I can coerce you."

"No, sir, you can't."

"Very well, we will drop the subject. Of course I cannot be held responsible for what *you* choose to say or do, sergeant."

"I'm glad that you see it in that light, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you," said Nick. "By the way, sergeant, won't you have a fresh cigar?"

"Thank you, yes."

"Help yourself, sergeant; and after you have lighted

it, if you care to see my house, I will take pleasure in showing you through it. It is a privilege which I accord to very few."

"I shall be honored and delighted, Mr. Carter."

"Come ahead, then. I think we will begin at the top of the house and work down. In that manner we will have finished when we arrive again at the parlor floor. Will that suit you?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"Come along," said Nick; and he led the way to the top of the house.

Now, all who are familiar with the Nick Carter histories will recall the fact that on the top floor of the house, in about the middle of the building, there is a small, padded room, windowless, and doorless, too, save for the single one of heavy oak, which is also padded on the inside, and which communicates with the hall. It is lighted from the top by a skylight, and that in turn is protected by a heavy iron grating.

There were often occasions when Nick found it necessary to bring desperate characters to his own home and to keep them there for a while.

When they reached the top floor together, Nick opened the door to the padded room, and then, stepping back a pace, he said, quite politely:

"Step inside, sergeant, if you please."

Suspecting nothing, the sergeant did as directed, and instantly the door closed behind him, for Nick

had closed and locked it, and then calmly walked away.

He did not even wait to hear the sergeant's shouts and threats, but went deliberately down the stairs to his particular den, where he seated himself, and having selected a book, began to read.

Presently Chick came in, and the detective laid aside the book.

"Have you heard the latest news, Chick?" he asked.

"Yes; if you refer to the escape of Codman."

"Sure. What else?"

"Are you going to take up the case again? Are you going after him?"

"I certainly am, Chick—to-morrow morning."

"Want me?"

"I think so. I'll tell you—to-morrow morning."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea if I should run up to Stonyhedge Court and take a little look around, Nick?"

"Yes—to-morrow morning."

Chick suddenly began to sit up and take notice.

"What is all this about to-morrow morning?" he asked.

"It is that I don't want anything at all done in the Codman matter before to-morrow morning."

"May I ask why?"

"You may—to-morrow morning."

"Nick, you certainly do know how to be most confoundedly aggravating when you take the notion."

"I suppose so; most people do. But, all the same, Chick, if you should happen to meet Doctor Codman on the street this afternoon or evening, I want you to pass him by without a word. Is that sufficiently plain?"

"Quite so."

"And to-morrow morning I want you to take off your hat and coat, metaphorically, and go for him for all you're worth. Have you got that down, too?"

"Yes."

"Until then, he is to be as free as air."

"All right."

"And now, Chick, I have got another thing to say to you."

"All right."

"You are to forget what I say now—until to-morrow morning. You are to remember it then. Can you do that?"

"Yes."

"I have an appointment to meet Codman this evening. I have talked with him over the telephone this afternoon. It is a part of my agreement with him that I was to tell nobody until three hours after that meeting; but I am telling you now for then. You are to make no use of the knowledge whatever before to-morrow morning. Have I your promise?"

"Yes."

"We have declared a sort of truce."

"How did it happen?"

"I called up his office without the least idea that he would be there, but he answered the call."

"The devil he did!"

"Fact. We had quite a chat, and the upshot of it was that we are to meet to-night. I am going after him with the automobile. We are to ride together—I don't know where."

"What is the reason for the meeting?"

"My reason is that I wish to study the man. I think he will say or do something to give himself away somehow. I don't know what his reason is."

"I can tell you what it is, Nick."

"Oh, I know what you are going to say, but I don't agree with you."

"He is going to play some devil's trick on you, depend upon it."

"I hardly think so, Chick; but even if I knew positively that he intended to make such an attempt it would not deter me from going."

"I know that. Don't you think I don't!"

"I shall be on my guard."

"You are not going to this meeting unarmed?"

"Certainly not."

"I don't like it at all, Nick. It looks mighty fishy to me."

"Oh, well, I'm going to take the chance."

"Who proposed this? You, or he?"

"I really think that I did it."

"He has got something up his sleeve for you, Nick."

"It is possible. It is even probable. However——" The detective paused and shrugged his shoulders expressively; then he added:

"By the way, we have a guest up-stairs—in the padded room."

"Who is it?"

"The sergeant from whom Codman escaped last night. He was present when I did the telephoning. I asked him to give me his word that he wouldn't mention the incident until I gave him permission to do so. He refused, and—well, I locked him up. And that reminds me, you had better telephone out to his station-house that I am detaining him here on a matter of business till to-morrow morning. Will you attend to it?"

"Yes."

"Now, Chick, I have told you about this affair in order that you may guess what has become of me if I shouldn't happen to show up before morning."

"I wish you wouldn't go on this fool's errand Nick.

"Of course I shall go, Chick."

"Then I wish you would take me with you."

"That is impossible."

"Then let me mosey along to the place of meeting and see what happens."

"No; that would be to go against the agreement."

"Do you suppose for a moment that *he* will respect any agreement he has made with you?"

"To tell you the truth, Chick, I rather think he will."

"Well, I don't."

"A mere difference of opinion."

"Can't I tag along behind somehow?"

"No; I forbid it."

"Suppose I should go against your orders for once in my life?"

"It would be the first, and also the last, time, Chick." replied the detective seriously.

"You know very well that I won't do such a thing."

"Of course I know it."

Chick was silent for a considerable time. Then he said:

"What do you suppose is his reason for wishing to meet you, Nick?"

"I don't know; only I suspect that it has something to do with the man's conceit. He is like Quartz—an egoist. He wants to talk with me. He wants to show me how smart he is. He is anxious that I should understand what a superior fellow he is. He wants to show himself off to me; and unless I very much mistake the man, he wishes to defy me."

"It is *my* opinion that he wishes to murder you."

"Tut, tut, Chick. Don't be so melodramatic."

"I think it, just the same."

"I won't give him a chance, Chick."

"No; not with ordinary weapons. But he doesn't fight with the same sort of weapons that other men use. He fights with poisons."

"Granted. But I am, therefore, on my guard."

"Would you have been on your guard if you had been in that station-house last night when he made his escape?"

"Possibly not."

"Depend upon it, he has in mind some performance of that sort against you to-night."

"It is possible, as I have said; but I do not think so."

"Where are you to meet?"

"I think I will not tell you that."

"Why? Do you think I will go against your orders in the matter?"

"No; but the temptation would be great."

"Isn't there some way of getting around this affair, Nick, so that I can be at least within call in case of necessity for it?"

"No, Chick, there is not. Things will have to stand as they are."

"All right," said Chick. "Oh, all right."

CHAPTER XIII.

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT.

At exactly half-past seven to the minute that night, Nick Carter's big Peerless car drew up rapidly in front of the main entrance to Stoneyhedge Court and came to a stop.

At the same instant, as if by a preconcerted signal, two men, one of whom was a burly negro, came rapidly from the entrance to the building and approached the motor-car almost on a run.

Each of the men carried a bundle—huge bundles they were, wrapped in burlap—and these they threw into the tonneau of the car.

Then they parted. Neither of them uttered a word, but the negro turned and hurried away up the street toward the avenue, while the other strode swiftly around to the side of the machine, threw himself into the chauffeur's seat, seized the wheel, threw on the power, and the automobile started ahead with a leap.

Inside of two minutes they were in Broadway and had turned northward, traveling so rapidly that Nick said quietly to the silent man who sat beside him and who was handling the car:

"I am afraid, doctor, that if you go at this rate, some of the bicycle cops along here will hold you up.

Good Lord, man! you haven't even disguised yourself."

"No." The doctor had pushed his cap back and had turned his sataniclike countenance toward the detective. "I didn't think it necessary."

"Why? Haven't the officers been to your rooms to-day?"

"Not one. It never occurred to them to look there for me. You were the only one who had the sense to think of it, and even you used the telephone. You did not really suppose I had gone there, did you?"

"N-no."

"Well, Carter, I have been there all day. I went directly there after I reached the city, and I haven't left the house since."

"You certainly have the courage of your convictions, doctor."

"Yes; I usually have."

"Where are we bound for now, doctor? You are running the machine, you know."

"Yes, I know; and I am intensely obliged to you. You have no idea of the service you are rendering me."

"I suppose not. Where are we bound?"

"Do you mind if I do not reply to that question just yet? I will if you insist, but I would prefer to defer it."

"As you please. What have you got in those bundles?"

"Merely some of my effects which I did not care to leave behind me."

"I see. I suppose it is on account of those that you are so deeply grateful to me, eh?"

"Partly that—yes."

"This is rather a paradoxical position for me to be in, doctor."

"I suppose it is." He turned his face again toward the detective, and there was a grim smile upon it.

"You are a brave man, Carter," he said.

"Why so?"

"To consent to put yourself so completely in my power."

"Am I so completely in your power as you seem to think?"

"You are."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, for instance, by one turn of this steering-wheel, I could wreck the car, and kill you. You will admit that, won't you?"

"Yes. But then you would meet with the same fate."

"But I have much less to live for than you; you have everything. And then again, knowing what I was about to do, I would be prepared for it and might save myself."

"It all sounds to me like a very unnecessary argument," said Nick.

"Then again," continued the doctor, "I might, with my disengaged hand, prick you with a pin that is even now reposing in the lapel of my coat. If I should do that, you would drop dead before we had traveled another rod."

"Was it to tell me these interesting things about what you might do that you brought about this meeting?"

"No; but as I said before, you are a brave man to risk so much for a man you hate."

"Hate? I don't hate you, doctor. My feelings toward you are not so exalted as that."

"Despise, then."

"That is nearer the mark; although I do not think that is the correct word, either."

"You certainly have no love for me."

"That is quite true, doctor."

"If you weren't bound by a promise, you would seek to capture me now, and take me to prison."

"That is also quite true."

"Why, Carter? What have I done to you?"

"To me, personally—nothing."

"Then why——"

"You are on one side of society; I am on the other. The two sides are at war with each other. That is all."

"Are you in love with Miss Nancy Graeme?"

"I have never thought of such a thing."

"Has her family any particular interest for you?"

"None whatever."

"Then how have I offended you?"

"You haven't offended me. You interest me. You are a criminal, and a clever one. My profession is to catch criminals. Sooner or later I will catch you, doctor."

"Ha! Do you think so, indeed?"

"No; I know it."

"Possibly you are overconfident."

"I do not think so."

"Can we not establish a lasting truce between us?"

"Impossible, doctor. Did you bring me out here to ask that question?"

"Partly; but there are others."

"Let us hear them."

"Would you like to make a million dollars, Carter?"

"Not particularly. I have two or three already."

"Indeed! I was not aware of that."

"What is the next question?"

"Did you believe that I would keep the promis I made to you over the telephone? Answer truthfully."

"Yes, I did."

"Why did you believe it? You do not regard me as a man of honor, do you?"

"No; I can't say that I do."

"Then why did you believe me?"

"That is rather a metaphysical question. I don't think that I could answer it."

"This is a fine machine you have here, Carter."

"Yes; and that reminds me. Where are you taking it?"

They were crossing the bridge into Westchester County when the detective asked the question, and for a moment the doctor did not reply. But, after a pause, he said:

"I have a laboratory up here a few miles farther. It is hidden away in the depths of a forest where it would be impossible to find it unless you knew the road. I am taking you there, Carter."

"Why?"

"In order that we may talk undisturbed. You will be at liberty to leave there at any time you please, of course."

"Certainly; I understand that."

"I have some things there which I wish to show to you. I think you will be interested."

"Will you tell me why you wish to show them to me?"

"No; not until after I have made the exhibit. After that, I will tell you."

"You are pleased to be mysterious, doctor."

"Not at all; but I do not wish to spoil a climax by betraying it beforehand."

"Quite so. How much farther is it?"

"Five miles. We leave the main road just above here."

"Don't puncture my tires, doctor."

"There is no danger."

They rode on in silence after that for a considerable distance, which was broken at last by the doctor.

"There is really no very serious charge against me, is there, Carter?" he asked.

"Attempted murder. That is all."

"But you couldn't prove even that."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that. Doctor Stag is a very wise old chap. He has some of your medicines at his house. He has been working over them for a considerable time."

"Bah! He couldn't analyze them in a thousand years."

"Possibly not."

"Neither he nor any one else. They defy analysis, Carter. All my poisons do that."

Nick smiled at the trees beside the road.

"Now," he thought, "we are getting at it. We have struck upon his hobby. I may expect him to be an interesting study from now on."

Aloud, he said:

"You are a wonderful toxicologist, doctor."

The doctor did not at once respond to this remark; instead he seemed to be turning it over in his mind like a tender morsel. At last he said:

"Don't think me a brag. I do not mean it so; but it is the truth that there is not another man in all the world who possesses a tenth part of the knowledge of poisons and how to create them that I do—and it is an accident that I have attained to the knowledge I possess."

"How is that?"

"I need not tell you that. Suffice it to say that I have traveled extensively in the Far East; I have studied in Venice, in Rome, in India. I have unearthed secrets which have been hidden away from human knowledge for centuries. I know the secrets of the ancient Egyptians, of the Phœnecians. I have read manuscripts which no human eyes but mine have seen in thousands of years. I have penetrated to the palace of the Grand Lama of Tibet, and I have lived there an honored guest. There is no disease known to man which I cannot cure; nor is there a disease known to man which I cannot induce."

"It is a terrible knowledge to possess, doctor."

"It is a splendid knowledge to possess, Carter."

"With it all you should be the greatest man of your time."

"With it all I *am* the greatest man of my time."

"And yet you permit yourself to descend to the commission of paltry crimes. Why?"

"I need money to continue my travels and my studies."

"Why not seek it in a legitimate manner?"

"It is much too slow a method."

"Why take human life in your researches?"

"Human life is no more to me than the snap of my fingers. A man's life or a woman's life is merely an incident; nothing more."

"To what do you hope to attain by further studies?"

"Who knows? To the secret of life, perhaps. Nobody has ever discovered that. But I have it—almost! *almost!*"

They turned from the main road into a narrow way through a forest, and the doctor said:

"We are nearly there now, Carter; nearly there."

CHAPTER XIV.

NICK CARTER'S STRANGEST EXPERIENCE.

During the last half-hour of their ride and particularly since the subject of the doctor's science had been mentioned, Nick Carter had decided finally in his own mind that he was in the company of a maniac.

A monomaniac, to be sure, but none the less an insane person whenever the subject of his malady should be mentioned.

Many men have gone mad in the pursuit of further knowledge. Parnassus is the first of whom we have official record, when he chained Prometheus to the rock and tortured him with fire in order that he might depict with his brush and pigments upon the canvas the awful realization of human agony.

There have been others counted by thousands since that time; and now here was one, riding calmly beside the detective.

It was evident to Nick that Codman had spoken truly when he described his extensive travels and his studies; and it was also evident that the superabundance of scientific knowledge he had attained relative to poisons and their manufacture had driven him mad on that one subject.

That last remark of his, before they turned into the forest road, was sufficient proof of it, for who has

dared to make the effort to discover the secret of his life unless he has been first made mad?

"And yet," thought the detective, "on all other subjects he is sane enough."

The road through the forest was rough and uneven, and they were obliged to move very slowly in order to do no injury to the spring or the tires of the motor-car.

In places there was barely room between the trees for them to pass, and the road—if it might be called a road—turned and twisted and constantly ascended until at last the doctor brought the machine to a stop on a ledge of rocks which overlooked a deep ravine, the bottom of which was completely hidden by the foliage of trees, the tops of which were many feet below them.

"We will leave the automobile here," said the physician. "It will be an easy matter for you to turn it around and follow the back track when you are ready to return. Will you do me the kindness to carry one of the bundles, Carter?"

"But where in blazes are you going?" demanded the detective.

"Down there," was the reply, and he pointed toward the bottom of the ravine.

"But why—what for?"

"My laboratory is there."

"But I care nothing for your laboratory. It has

no interest for me. I think I have gone quite far enough," said the detective quietly.

It was an uncanny spot where they were standing. The headlight of the automobile had, of course, guided them through the woods, and here the forest was somewhat open, so that the full moon could send its beams down upon them.

In reply to Nick's objections, the doctor only laughed.

"Come," he said, chuckling. "Don't be foolish. I tell you that I will show you something which no human eye save mine has ever seen; and, besides, we have not had our conference as yet. Come."

The detective hesitated. He had never in his life known what fear was, but just at the present moment his better judgment warned him that he ought not place himself further in the power of this man.

Nick had no means of knowing what might await him at the bottom of that deep ravine. It was within possibility that there might be confederates of the doctor there, who would leap out upon the detective without warning, overpower him, and thus hold him a prisoner, notwithstanding the promises that had been made.

And for what fate would he be held, once he were captured?

This crazy man who was studying the "secret of life" might be plotting to make Nick Carter a victim

of his scientific pursuits. In that moment Nick remembered the infamous Doctor Quartz and his scientific studies. He remembered the vivisectionists of Lake Simcoe, in Ontario—and he hesitated.

"Come," said the doctor again; and he took one of the bundles from the tonneau, threw it across his shoulder, and turned away without another word through a path which the moonlight plainly revealed to them; for while he had been talking with the detective, he had taken occasion to shut off the headlight of the automobile.

Nick watched him go, without moving from his tracks. He listened intently, and he could hear the doctor as he scrambled down the pathway, which evidently became quite steep before it descended far.

And then, when he was quite sure that the doctor had gone on without so much as turning to discover if he were followed, Nick suddenly decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

Leaving the second bundle where it was, in the tonneau, Nick turned aside and disappeared among the trees; not along the pathway which Codman had followed, but at an acute angle from it, and presently having discovered a dense growth of laurel, he concealed himself in the midst of it—and waited.

An hour passed without so much as a sound coming to the detective's ears, save the regular night noises of the forest.

Nick was on the point of changing his position; he was just about to make his way slowly down the path when he heard the sound of stealthy footsteps approaching up that steep incline, and a moment later the moon shone full upon the upturned face of Doctor Codman as he crept nearer to the detective on his hands and knees.

It was evident that since Nick first heard him he had dropped into that position in order to approach more silently. Nick no longer entertained any doubt that there was an ulterior motive in bringing him to this place; but he was still in doubt as to what that motive might be.

He waited, therefore, silently watching what the doctor might do.

At the end of the pathway, where it looked out upon the little clearing around the ledge where the automobile stood, Codman paused and silently regarded the machine.

At last, as if satisfied that the detective was not there, he rose to his feet and approached the machine, and Nick could hear him muttering to himself.

"Where the devil did he go?" the detective heard him murmur. "I wonder if he has flunked—got scared? No; that isn't like Nick Carter, from all that I have heard of him. More than likely he has followed me down the path, and then when he saw me

returning, he has stepped to one side until I passed. If he has——"

The mere idea of such a thing seemed to spur the doctor to hasty action, for he sprang forward, seized the remaining bundle from the tonneau, and, turning rapidly, he disappeared for the second time down the pathway.

For an instant more the detective hesitated again. The question in his mind was whether he should follow the doctor, or leap into the car and hasten away to return after the three hours of truce should elapse.

This latter idea was plainly what he should have done. It was logically the only proper course for him to pursue under the circumstances; but yet there was an element about such a course which was intensely displeasing to the detective. On the face of it, it looked like an exhibition of cowardice; it looked—to himself—as if he were afraid to proceed with the adventure to the end.

He stepped quickly to the machine, withdrew the spark-plug, and dropped it into one of his pockets; then, turning quickly, he began a rapid but silent descent of the pathway.

The bottom of the ravine was reached at last, and as he stepped out upon the almost level floor of rocks with which nature had paved the place he saw directly in front of him a rather commodious cabin built of

hewn logs, from which, through an open door and a window beside it, a light was gleaming.

The detective crept forward silently, taking care to keep in the shadow of the cliff so that if the doctor should happen to come to the door to look outside he would not be seen.

He nearly uttered an exclamation of surprise when he had secured a position from which he could obtain a view of the interior of the cabin.

Codman was bending over a rude table which stood in the center of the single room of the cabin, and stretched upon that table at full-length was an object which appeared to be the naked body of a man of almost mammoth proportions.

From the waist down the body was concealed by a sheet, which had been thrown carelessly over it; but it was the attitude of the physician which astonished the detective, and made him wonder what in the world Codman was doing.

The man seemed entirely to have forgotten the proximity of the detective—or he was careless concerning it; Nick could not determine which.

Just now he was bending over the silent form upon the table, with his own face within a few inches of that of the supposed corpse, as if he were engaged in a profound study of the dead features.

More than that, at stated intervals, and with the regularity of clockwork, Codman seized upon first

one arm and then the other of the form upon the table, and after raising it slowly to a certain height, dropped it again to its place beside the body.

He seemed to be counting time while he performed this strange ceremony. It was as if he were saying to himself:

"One, two, three—raise the right arm; four, five, six—replace it. One, two, three—raise the left arm; four, five, six—replace it. One, two, three," etc., over and over again with a regularity and precision that was maddening to one who looked silently on at the scene, as the detective was doing.

And that gigantic form upon the improvised table! What was it? What could it have been?

The dead body of a man? The murdered body of a victim of the doctor's pursuit of science? Could it be that?

It seemed incredible to the detective; and again he took his eyes from the strange antics of the physician and studied the silent form upon the table.

"If that is the dead body of a man," he mused, "he was a giant when he lived. If I am any judge of proportions, that chap would be eight feet tall if he were standing upright."

And, indeed, it was true.

"I wonder," thought the detective, "if that is what he wished to show me? I wonder if I am needlessly

alarmed? I wonder if, after all, I have to do with a madman who is practically harmless?"

He was silent again for a time, watching the doctor, who never once desisted in his clockwork regularity of moving the arms of the body in front of him up and down, and gazing intently into the waxen face the while; then he added:

"At all events, he seems to be alone. There are no confederates here. I have only to fear the subtle poisons which the doctor uses, and I can guard against them by keeping far enough away from him. I am as quick, or quicker, than he is, and I have my little revolvers in my sleeves. I think it is up to me to see this thing through to the end; and plainly it is my duty to know more concerning that remarkable body on the table. Here goes!"

Without further hesitation he stepped briskly forward, ascended the two steps to the doorway, and stepped inside the cabin.

Nick thought at first that the doctor did not hear him; but in that he was mistaken, for after a moment, without turning his head, or pausing for an instant in the regularity of his occupation, he said:

"Ah, Carter; here at last? Help yourself to a seat. I'll talk with you presently. Take that Morris chair in the corner. It's the only decent one I have in this place."

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET OF LIFE.

The detective seated himself as he was directed to do, and coolly lighted a cigar; then he leaned back comfortably in the chair while he watched the doctor narrowly.

Presently, in a tone which suggested that the idea had just occurred to him, he said:

"Codman, would you mind telling me what the devil you are doing?"

Without turning his head, the doctor replied:

"I am working over my model—as you see."

"Ah; it is a model, then?"

"Certainly; what did you suppose it was?"

"From outside the door it appeared surprisingly like a dead body; like the corpse of a man."

"It will be a living body before I am through with it."

"*What!*" exclaimed Nick, surprised in spite of himself into an exclamation.

"It will be a living body before I am through with it."

"Indeed! You surprise me! Is that what you meant when you referred to the 'secret of life' while we were in the motor-car?"

"Precisely."

"Then it is not really a corpse? It looks surprisingly like one."

"Did you ever see a man of the size of this fellow, Carter?" was the retort.

"Once; in Barnum's show."

"Oh! the big colonel. I remember him. Yes, he was about this fellow's size."

"May I come closer, doctor, and have a look at him?"

"No; remain where you are until I have finished here. After that you may."

"How long do you keep up that sort of thing?"

"It depends entirely upon results, Carter. Sometimes a few moments only; sometimes for hours. It depends—it depends."

He had not once turned his head or looked at the detective, and he was engaged in a most uncanny and—in one respect, at least—repulsive occupation; and yet he spoke as naturally as if they were seated in a parlor and engaged in a discussion of the most ordinary affairs.

"May I inquire what your model is made of?" asked Nick, after another pause.

"No; you may not—at present. Be quiet now, if you please. I told you that I would show you something that no human eye but mine had ever seen. Now you know what I meant."

"Yes."

Again there was silence; this time a long one, while the doctor continued to work steadily over his strange model, and Nick was reminded again of what had occurred to him while he was outside:

"One, two, three; raise the right arm. Four, five, six; replace it. One, two, three; raise the left arm. Four, five, six; replace it."

A half-hour passed in utter silence and Nick was rapidly becoming impatient.

He had turned his head away and was gazing out through the open door into the darkness, when he heard a sharp exclamation from the doctor. Turning quickly to see what had caused it, he almost leaped from his chair in his astonishment and consternation.

The huge figure on the table was sitting bolt upright in its place; the eyes were open and staring, apparently, straight ahead; the jaws of the monster were working horribly, and there were convulsive and spasmodic movements of the muscles of the chest and arms.

Nick could see the huge biceps swell and relax; he could see the giant chest expand and contract; the muscles of the throat protruded and then receded; the scalp with its shock of tawny hair moved forward and then back again.

The face had not been a repulsive one in repose; now it was horrible in the musclar contortions it underwent.

The detective started to his feet, but the cold voice of the doctor, speaking in a low but intense tone, interrupted him:

"Sit down, Carter," he said. "Don't you dare to move a step in this direction—now."

Nick relapsed into his chair.

"What devil's work is this?" was his thought; but he said nothing aloud.

After a moment, while the detective watched with a fascination he would not have believed possible in himself, the spasmodic contortions of the muscles ceased. The face of the monster became composed and placid once more; then slowly, very slowly, the huge body sank backward into its former attitude until it was once again stretched at full-length along the top of the table.

Codman placed the arms of the giant along the sides of the body; then he drew up the sheet until it was entirely covered, and then, with a smile on his satanic countenance, he turned and faced the detective.

His eyes were shining strangely; his lips were parted, showing his gleaming teeth; his black and pointed beard seemed to stand out as if it were an index indicating the detective.

But otherwise the man appeared to be his natural self, although he seemed to be greatly fatigued by the exertions he had just undergone.

Without making any remark, he crossed the room to another table, helped himself to a cigar, which he lighted, and then threw himself at full-length on his back upon a convenient couch.

"Do me the favor not to speak for a few moments, Carter," he said; and he closed his eyes and instantly appeared to be sleeping.

Nick left his chair and crossed to the door, looking out upon the moonlit scene, for, although the cliffs left the cabin itself in shadow, the light of the moon shone full upon the opposite side of the ravine.

He was startled presently by the voice of Codman, speaking almost into his ear.

"Come, Carter," he said. "I am rested now. It is fatiguing work, fighting against the thing which we call nature's law. But I am winning. I am winning."

"What is that thing upon the bench?" asked Nick severely, pointing toward the inanimate object under the sheet.

The doctor smiled, and replied:

"It is the body of a man—a giant, isn't it?"

"But *is* it?"

"You have seen for yourself; how do *you* answer the question?"

"I cannot answer it. I confess that I am puzzled."

"Good. Sit down again, Carter. Take that Morris chair again."

"Thank you. But, my question——"

"I have replied to it. It is the body of a man."

"The dead body of a man who was once alive?"

"Hardly that; rather it is the living body of a man who was once dead."

"You speak in riddles."

"I speak scientifically, Carter."

"You get beyond me. Tell me what it is."

"Just now it is nothing; less than nothing unless you might call it a masterpiece of my own handiwork."

"Do you mean, Codman, that you *made* that thing?"

Codman bowed his head in token of assent.

"That you *manufactured* it?"

"Yes."

"From what?"

"From chemistry; from my knowledge of science; from knowledge alone. From liquids and solids; from the air. From nothing, if you will."

"Confound it, Codman, let me look at it."

"Not yet. Later. Sit still. We must talk. I am tired now."

"Well?"

"Have you ever read 'Frankenstein'? That horrible story by Mrs. Shelley?"

"Yes."

"You know how her hero manufactured his monster, do you not?"

"Yes."

"He robbed graveyards; he dissected corpses; he resorted to all sorts of means to procure material for his work. I did nothing so crude as that."

"Plainly the man is hopelessly mad," thought the detective. Aloud, he said:

"What did you do?"

"My dear Carter, I *made* the parts I wanted. I created them. Ordinary flesh would spoil it; it would rot; it would become offensive in no time, would it not?"

"I should think so."

"Yonder"—he pointed toward the benchlike table—"is no ordinary flesh to rot and become corrupt. It is only flesh when I will it so; when I animate it with life—as you saw me do just now. When I leave it—when I restore it to the condition in which it now is, there is nothing there to be corrupted. In an hour from now, if you were alone here, and should remove that sheet, you would be convinced by the evidence of your own senses—by the senses of seeing and of feeling—that I am a great sculptor, and that yonder figure is a carved image, done in marble—and yet, you have already seen it otherwise."

"That is true."

"You have seen it move. You have seen it sit up. You have seen its staring eyes; its moving muscles; its contorting features. You have seen its bosom heave

as if with the breath of life. You have seen all this, have you not?"

"Yes."

"And will you refuse the evidence of your own eyes?"

"No; I cannot do that."

"Will you believe that that monster—as you no doubt have christened it—lives?"

"No; I do not believe that it lives. I believe that you somehow animated it."

"Have that as you will. It moved."

"Yes; it moved. But what made it move?"

"I did."

"How? Is there a mechanism inside the body?"

For an instant the doctor scowled at the detective angrily; then he smiled and replied:

"Yes; the same sort of mechanism that is inside your body—and mine. Heart, and lungs, and the ordinary and regular functionary parts of a human body."

"Nothing else?"

"No; nothing else."

"Let me see it, doctor. Let me have a nearer view."

For reply, Codman looked at his watch.

"After another five minutes," he said, as if he were working and waiting by a time-table.

"Tell me, then, while we wait that five minutes, what you are accomplishing, or what you expect to

accomplish by this strange work of yours?" asked Nick.

"I have told you once already."

"A knowledge of what you call the secret of life?"

"Precisely. And I have got it—*almost.*"

"When you have discovered it—if you do so—what then?"

"What then, what then, do you ask? Everything then. No more disease. No more death by reason of what is now termed natural causes. Life eternal, if you will have it so; that is, material life eternal. Do you comprehend me now?"

"Hardly. Not quite, I think."

"Come," said the doctor, rising and approaching the bench. "The time of waiting is over."

He drew back the sheet, exposing the huge body to view, which was now as white as the muslin that covered it; and Nick stretched forth one hand and touched it.

Instantly he drew his hand away with an exclamation of astonishment.

The body was as cold, as hard, and as white as if it were indeed a marble statue.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MOMENT OF INFINITE PERIL.

Codman had asked the detective, but a moment before, if he could believe the evidence of his own senses, and he had replied that he could; but now, as he rested his hand upon the apparently marble statue, he felt that it was next to impossible to do so.

He knew that he had seen that stone image sitting upright before him. He knew that he had seen it move. He had seen it lie back gently in its resting-place after the administrations of the uncanny doctor were over.

He had seen those marble muscles move with spasmodic action; he had seen those eyes of stone, open and staring; he had seen those beardless jaws open and close again, disclosing strong and even teeth.

He had seen that graven chest rise and fall as if there were breath beneath it, *and he had seen the red glow of life diffuse itself beneath a skin that was as apparent as his own.*

The doctor was smiling at him when he turned.

"What do you think of it now?" he demanded.

"I do not know what to think," admitted the detective.

"Do you think that, for instance, I am the villain,

the scoundrel, the criminal you have painted me? Or do you now think that I am a man of science who pursues his studies in spite of all opposition?"

There was a strange light in the doctor's eyes when he asked the question; it was almost a menacing one; and Nick replied quietly:

"Codman, you made yourself a criminal when you sought to murder Nancy Graeme with your subtle poisons. You——"

"I never meant to murder her at all. She would have been none the worse for her experiences. She would have been much better off, in fact. I meant to save her, and to make her my wife."

"That is begging the question," said Nick. "But again you made a criminal of yourself when you abducted her brother, drugged him into a semblance of imbecility, and turned him at large in a great city when he did not know his own name, or who he was at all."

"I meant to restore him ultimately to his reason."

"Yes. When you had stolen his fortune, for you made a criminal of yourself again when you set yourself to steal the fortunes of that boy and girl. If you were ten thousand times the scientist you are, you would still be a criminal."

"Damn your logic, Carter! It has nothing to do with my science."

"It has much to do with mine."

"With your trade, you mean, the trade of a thief-catcher."

"Call it what you will, Codman; but at the same time call yourself the thief."

"By Heaven, Carter——"

"Hush! Our compact reads that we are not to attempt to injure each other. Plain speaking can hurt neither of us."

"Our compact. Yes; to be sure. For the moment I had forgotten that there was one."

He smiled strangely into the detective's eyes as he said this, and Nick could not avoid a feeling of uneasiness in the presence of this strange man.

"Just what was that compact, Carter?" the doctor continued, after a pause. "It was a truce between us, was it not?"

"Yes."

"To continue until three hours after you have left me; until three hours after we part. Those were the terms, were they not?"

"Yes."

"And during the truce we each pledged ourselves to make no effort to injure the other. Is that also your understanding of the matter?"

"Yes."

"Good. You will keep your word to the letter, and I will keep mine. Until three hours after we separate; so said the bond?"

"Yes."

"Good again. Now let us return to pleasanter subjects. Are you in haste to be gone?"

"No; I would prefer now to wait until daylight."

The doctor chuckled and looked at his watch.

"It shall be so, then," he said, "until daylight; and if you will wait still longer, you shall stand beside me while I operate upon the general again."

"The general?"

"I have so named him, for want of something better. Some day he shall select his own name."

"You don't mean to tell me, doctor, that you expect some day to imbue this marble image with actual life. You cannot have convinced yourself of such folly as that."

"Why not? Certainly I believe it. You shall remain here and see it done—if you like."

"But I do not like. Moreover, you will not have an opportunity to do it, I fear, and I begin to think that it will be a charitable act to separate you from your labors for a time."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Have you forgotten the conditions of the truce?"

"No."

"Have you an idea that I do not mean to return here for you?"

"Ah! you mean that, do you?"

"Yes. It is as well to be frank, is it not?"

"Of course. Three hours after you leave here you will turn about and return, will you?"

"Then, or a little later."

"Good. So be it. Three hours after you leave here. Resume your chair again, Carter. As I said before, it is the only comfortable chair in the place. So."

Codman leaned forward as Nick dropped into the chair, and as the detective sank upon the cushions the doctor seized upon one of the arms and gave it a sudden wrench.

As Codman made this entirely unexpected move, the detective attempted to leap to his feet again, but before he could accomplish it, a portion of the arm of the chair that had been wrenched loose swung quickly around in front of him.

An instant later there was a sharp click, and Nick Carter found that he was as thoroughly imprisoned in that chair as if he had been confined in old-fashioned stocks.

For a moment he struggled, but he quickly discovered that he could not hope to break the chair. Next, he sought to raise his body through the opening, but he realized instantly that the arm which had been moved against his body in front and which imprisoned him was provided with sharp, clawlike points which caught in his clothing first, and then pricked into his flesh when he persisted in his efforts.

In the meantime, Codman had stood away at a little distance, silently regarding him; and when at last Nick realized that all effort to escape from his present predicament was useless, the doctor said deprecatingly:

"I am sorry, Carter; I hope you don't consider that I have committed a breach of the truce between us."

"I certainly do," replied Nick. "But it is my own fault. I should have known that you would do it sooner or later."

"And yet," murmured the doctor dreamily, "the terms of our truce were that it was to continue until three hours after we parted. You will bear in mind that we have not parted as yet."

"All that is mere sophistry, Codman."

"I have not injured you in any way; I am merely detaining you here until it pleases me to let you go—and the truce continues until three hours after that time."

"Bah!"

"It is so that I understand the bond."

"Well, what are you going to do next?"

"I shall sit here and chat with you. Your arms are free; will you have a fresh cigar?"

"Yes."

"You are an interesting chap, Carter. You take things coolly."

"You might not think so if I were at liberty."

"Do you suppose that because you overcame me,

when we fought together in the mausoleum, that you could do it again?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I have—many. You conquered me by a trick."

"There are other tricks, Codman."

"Oh, yes. I wish you would forgive me for confining you for a time. I had to do it, for I foresaw that in a few hours you would insist upon taking your leave, and that in three hours after that you would return."

"Precisely."

"I could not permit that, you see. It would not do to have a whim of yours destroy the labor of years. It became necessary to detain you; and that I have succeeded in accomplishing without actually breaking the terms of our compact."

"How long do you intend to keep me here, Codman?"

"I do not know. It is a question which I cannot answer myself."

"Who can answer it, then?"

"The general. He lies yonder."

"Pshaw! You make me tired!"

Codman shrugged his shoulders.

"Nevertheless, I speak the truth," he said. "It all lies with the general."

"A chunk of marble whom you believe can speak to you."

"You have yourself seen that same chunk of marble instinctive with life."

"I have been deceived into *thinking* that I observed such a phenomenon."

"There was no deception practised. It was truth."

"You are yourself deceived."

A flush of anger crept over Codman's face, but it quickly disappeared, and he laughed.

"You are a fool, Carter," he said.

"And you—you are a madman, Codman."

Codman's eyelids narrowed together to slits, and through them the eyes themselves blazed with the fury of a savage beast; his lips parted in a snarl, and he showed his gleaming teeth like the fangs of a wolf; his face went red and then turned as white as chalk, while the hair on his head seemed to bristle upward, just as a cat's tail grows big in anger.

His hands clenched and unclenched themselves, and he bent forward with an expression of such utter ferocity that Nick, helpless as he was, was appalled by the storm he had created.

The detective understood it, too, in that moment of danger; for it seemed as if the infuriated doctor would strangle him then and there—if he could do so; but Nick suddenly remembered the revolvers he carried in his sleeves, and he raised his right arm ready to throw it down and shoot, if the doctor should venture to attack him.

He understood that he had called down this wrath upon him by touching the doctor on a tender spot when he had called him a madman. The doctor *was* mad; there was no doubt of that. And the doctor *knew* he was mad; there was also no doubt of that.

He knew of his own madness, and he strove always to conceal it from others; and here, in front of him, was a helpless prisoner who dared to tell him of it.

For a full two minutes this terrible tableau continued: Nick, with his hand raised, ready to throw it forward and fire; the doctor like a coiled steel spring, ready to be released, and prepared to crush everything before it.

It was a moment of intesity which Nick Carter never forgot. It was a moment fraught with infinite peril for both, for Nick Carter had determined that if Codman made one move in his direction, he would shoot him dead on the spot.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MADMAN'S PRISONER.

But it passed, just as all things pass away. A condition of such tension could not long endure, and this one could not last.

Suddenly the doctor seemed to recover himself. Such color as he possessed—and it was never more than dimly perceptible—crept slowly back into his face; the eyelids widened; the blazing fire died out of his eyes; his lips loosened themselves over his white teeth; the dilated nostrils reassumed their normal attitude; the long, slender, tapering fingers became motionless, and at last with a deep sigh Codman sank back upon a chair and closed his eyes.

Nick lowered his right hand, and allowed it to rest upon the arm of the chair. He, too, sighed with relief, for it had been a trying moment; but he watched Codman narrowly, lest there should be a return of the paroxysm.

For a long time after that there was utter silence in the room save for the breathing of the two men; and at last, without uttering a word or glancing toward the detective, Codman left his chair and quietly passed out of the cabin into the night.

Nick watched him go, and said nothing: but after

the man had gone he moved his chair with his feet until he had so turned it that it faced the open door.

An hour passed, and Codman had not returned; another, and still he was absent; still more time, and the detective slept—but so lightly that he would be easily awakened.

Still, he did not open his eyes again until the sunlight of another day was streaming upon the tops of the trees in the ravine. Then he looked hastily around him, but quickly discovered that the doctor had not yet returned.

Hour after hour passed after that in that silent cabin, and the sun climbed and climbed until it was almost at the meridian, until its rays streamed in through the open door, but still Codman did not come.

Nor was the detective idle all this time. With his first waking moment he had sought in his pockets for that small case of tools which he always carried with him; tools which were carried inside the hollow handle; tools which were themselves no larger than the blade of an ordinary knife, but which were made of the finest of steel; tools which had stood him in good stead many a time, and which just now were more precious than ever.

He had great difficulty in getting at them owing to the position he occupied in the chair, but he succeeded at last. It was a little saw that he wanted, for the bar

across the chair in front of him which held him a prisoner was of oak.

When he had withdrawn the saw, and fixed it in its place in the handle, he at once began to work, and you can believe that it was no slight task to saw through a solid piece of seasoned oak, an inch and one-eighth in thickness and eight inches across, with an instrument so delicate.

But he sawed and sawed, and the doctor did not return. Minutes lengthened into hours, and still he worked on, realizing that he was very hungry and even more thirsty.

He believed that after he had sawed through one side of the oak arm, that with his great strength he could break the opposite loose and thus free himself. In this idea, however, he discovered that he was mistaken.

Under different circumstances he could have accomplished it; but, seated as he was with no purchase to obtain against the effort, he found that it was impossible; and so there was nothing for him to do but to begin over again with the saw at his left side.

And so it was that so many hours passed. Thus it was that it was almost noon before the task was completed, and he raised his stiffened body from the chair and crossed the room to a bucket of water from which he had seen Codman refresh himself.

He drank long and deeply, and it refreshed him

greatly, and then he turned, facing the door, and paused. He was wondering which he should do; wondering if it were better to make his escape from the cabin and to give Codman that three hours' grace, or if he should wait where he was for the doctor's return and capture him then and there.

But it was Nick Carter's pride that he never broke his word in letter or in spirit. Because Codman had failed him—or had, by a subterfuge, avoided a part of the obligations of his contract—Nick saw in that no reason to excuse himself for breaking his word. Therefore, he did not long remain in doubt.

"It shall go as it stands," he said to himself; and he stepped to a table whereon there was paper and a pencil, and wrote, after glancing at his watch:

"It is now high noon. Our truce endures until three o'clock. I live up to the spirit of our agreement if you do not. NICK CARTER."

He turned away then, and was moving toward the door when his eyes fell upon the sheet-covered object that was lying upon the bench. A spirit of investigation seized upon him.

"What will be the appearance of that object in the full light of day?" he asked himself.

Three quick strides took him to a position beside it. For one instant, then, he hesitated; and then with a sudden motion he jerked the sheet aside and cast it upon the floor.

A perfect, if gigantic, model of a man was stretched before him. No sculptor had ever wrought more splendidly, or more perfectly. It had the face and form of a giant Apollo with a touch of Hercules thrown in. It was as white as the driven snow. It was as hard as adamant.

Nick reached out his hand and touched it. It was cold, and it gave forth all the sensations of touching stone.

"What fiend possessed me to make me believe that I saw this thing move last night?" he asked himself. "What an exquisitely beautiful piece of work!"

The hair on the head of the image, which last night in the light of the lamp he had supposed to be of tawny hue, was now merely carved marble, done into waves.

The arms of the image, which he had supposed he saw the doctor raise and lower time after time with rhythmic motion, were now stiff, and cold, and hard —in a word, they were stone.

He had supposed that he saw the image sitting upright, but plainly this thing of stone could not bend.

What, then, was the mystery about it?

Nick forgot, in the interest he felt in his surroundings, that the doctor might return at any moment; but at last, with a sigh, he picked up the sheet again and threw it over the statue. Then, with one last glance around him, he passed rapidly to the door, and so on out of the cabin into the open air.

He found the path down which he had climbed so carefully the night before, and exercising great caution lest he should encounter the doctor unawares, he climbed to the top, and presently came out upon the ledge where he had left the automobile.

Then he stared in perplexity.

The automobile was no longer there. It had disappeared.

"It is plain," he thought to himself, "that the doctor has gone for a ride, and that he has helped himself to my machine. It is also possible that he has no intention of returning at all; and yet, I do not believe that he would consent to leave his graven image behind him. No; he has gone to execute some errand, and it is time that he was returning. The question is, shall I wait for him?"

But the question was answered for him. At the moment he asked it, he heard afar off the sound of the car approaching him. and he stepped into the thicket, concealed himself, and waited.

After a little the noises made by the approaching automobile ceased, and he was wondering why, when suddenly the tall, lithe figure of the doctor came into view. He was approaching rapidly, and—if the expression of his face was an indication—anxiously. He glanced neither to the right nor left, but made directly for the head of the pathway, and disappeared down it toward the cabin.

"Good!" the detective told himself. "Codman has left the machine farther back on the road. It makes it all the easier for me. I will keep my word, and give him the three hours."

He dashed away on a run, and ten minutes later, after he had covered about a quarter of a mile, he came upon the car, not only drawn up beside the road through the forest, but it had been turned about so that it faced in the direction which Nick wished to take.

"One might think that he arranged it so purposely for my use," thought the detective; and then he smiled as he added, "or for his own. But I must hurry. A man can travel almost as fast as an automobile over this frightful road."

He leaped inside the car, and smiled when he remembered that he had the spark-plug in his pocket.

"The doctor must have a supply of his own," he told himself; "and he has taken the one he used away with him. Fortunately, my own is handy."

In another moment he had started, and he made all the speed he dared to employ over such a road, for he had no doubt that the doctor would pursue him the moment he discovered the escape.

In this he was not mistaken.

He had passed the worst part of the going, and was just entering upon a stretch of better road, when he heard a shout behind him. For one brief instant he

turned his head, and in that instant he could see Codman running toward him with all the speed he could muster.

Had he approached so near ten minutes earlier he must have won in the race, for Nick had been obliged to move very slowly; now, however, the conditions were changed. The road was comparatively good, and Nick had no difficulty in distancing his pursuer.

But the doctor still chased him; still kept up an incessant calling out to him to stop, to wait.

"Carter! Carter! Wait! Wait! For God's sake, wait! I will apologize! We will renew the truce! It shall be as you say! Wait! Wait! You destroy my last hope! It will kill me! Carter! Carter! I might have killed you last night, but I did not!"

It was thus that he called and continued to call as long as the car was within hailing distance, and even after that, the detective did not doubt. But Nick kept steadily on, and as steadily gained.

Gradually the doctor was left behind, and at last a bend in the road lost him to view.

The detective wondered why Codman had not fired at him. He knew that the doctor was armed.

"Can it be possible that he respects the truce?" thought Nick; but he smiled at the mere thought of such a thing.

At last he came out upon the main road, where it was smooth and level, and here, the highway being de-

serted, he put the car to its best speed, and he was soon gliding along like an arrow from a bow.

He knew perfectly well where he was now, in the daylight, and he made for the nearest village, where he also knew he would find a telephone, for he realized what Chick's anxiety would be.

But it was Patsy who replied to him when he called. Chick, he said, had already gone out to search for traces of his chief.

"I'm all right, Patsy," said Nick. "What I want you to do is this: Telephone to Charles Wridgway for the fastest machine he has got, then find Chick and bring him here. I want you to be here by three o'clock, if it is a possible thing to make it. If you cannot find Chick within an hour, come without him. Understand?"

"You bet! I'll be there!" was the instant reply.

The detective also directed Patsy to set the sergeant free, to tell him that he had already explained his protracted absence to his chief, and to warn him that it would be best for his own interests to say as little as possible about his enforced detention in the house of the detective.

And then he set himself to wait until the allotted three hours of the truce had passed, for at three o'clock, whether Patsy had arrived or not, he was determined to return to the ravine in search of the doctor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MONSTER OF THE FOREST.

The detective's idea was that Codman would never wholly desert his marble statue.

Nick regretted now that he had not thought to discover something about the weight of the image while he was in the cabin. It had not occurred to him to do that. He had trusted solely to his eyes and to his sense of touch to determine of what material it was formed.

Nor could he divest his mind of the puzzle relative to the occurrences of the preceding night.

He could still see before him in his mind's eye that remarkable spectacle of the doctor raising and lowering those arms of marble with rhythmic motion; he could still see that gigantic body sitting upright on the bench, with the jaws working and the muscles heaving; and he could account for it in only one way, which was that there was an element of hypnotic power about it by which and through which he had been made to believe that he saw something which had not occurred at all.

Not that he considered himself at all a subject for hypnotic influence; but, nevertheless, he recalled an incident that had happened in India years before when

he had seen one of the fakirs perform that marvelous trick wherein the operator throws a rope into the air which appears to remain there, clinging to nothing, and where afterward a boy apparently climbs the rope until he disappears utterly from view.

Nick knew—because he had one day been concealed where he was not under the influence of the fakir—that there was in reality no rope and no boy; that it was merely hypnotic influence which compelled spectators to believe that they saw them; and he did not doubt that his own experiences of the preceding night could be explained in the same manner.

It was a small country hotel where he was stopping while he awaited the arrival of Chick and Patsy, and he passed a part of the time in disposing of a hearty meal, of which he stood very much in need.

It was after two o'clock when that was done, so he had only little more than a half-hour to wait—if his assistants were to arrive on time. It was, however, almost ten minutes past three before he heard the droning of an approaching automobile, and he had just determined to leave a note, and start on ahead.

But he waited now, and presently Patsy and Ten-Ichi arrived together; Chick was not there.

"We will leave this machine here and take mine," he said, as soon as they had exchanged greetings, and he had, in as few words as possible, explained all that had happened to him.

It was half-past three before they were finally started; but they made good time to the point where the turn was made into the road through the forest; and it was half-past four when they finally stopped upon the ledge of rock above the ravine, where Nick had left his machine upon the occasion of his first visit there.

"Now, lads," he said, as they got down and were preparing to descend the pathway into the glen, "one of you must remain here on guard, and the other goes with me. I know that you both desire to accompany me, so the best way to settle it will be to flip a coin."

"All right, sir," they said in unison.

"Patsy, I will give you heads; Ten-Ichi, yours will be tail;" and the detective spun a coin in the air.

"Ten-Ichi goes with me; Patsy remains here," he said, as he looked at it. "If we should happen to need you, Pat, you can easily hear us call, and, if we do, you have only to follow the path to the bottom of the ravine and turn to the right when you get there. Come along, Ten-Ichi."

He led the way into the glen, with Ten-Ichi following, and presently the log cabin was before them. As they passed around to the front of it, Nick saw that the door was closed, and apparently fastened, and that a heavy board shutter concealed the window.

Without hesitation the detective stepped forward and rapped loudly against the door; but there came no

response whatever to his summons. He rapped again and again, several times, and at last, turning to Ten-Ichi, he said:

"I think that our bird has flown, although it is possible that he may be inside."

It was only an ordinary lock which fastened the door, and Nick quickly picked it; and then as he pushed the door ajar he stepped back quickly, for it was not illogical to suppose that the doctor might be waiting inside the house to attack them. However, there was no demonstration of any kind.

The interior of the house was as silent as a grave, and almost as dark. Perceiving this, Nick stepped quickly inside and threw open the shutter at the window; and then Ten-Ichi followed him.

The detective's first glance was toward the bench upon which the image had rested; and he breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered that the sheet was still there, and that it apparently still covered the sleeping giant.

But when he stepped forward and withdrew the sheet he started back in dismay, for the image had disappeared, and in its place were a few rolls of burlap and old clothing, placed there evidently to make it appear that the sheet still covered the statue.

Again did Nick have reason to regret that he had not thought to test the weight of the sleeping giant when he had the opportunity; but regrets were use-

less now. The image had disappeared, and it was evident that the doctor had found some means of removing it unaided.

With the sole exception of the disappearance of the statue, the interior of the cabin was in the same condition in which the detective had left it; and now he pointed to the chair in which he had been a prisoner, and from which he had sawed himself to liberty.

"That is where he had me, Ten-Ichi," he said. "What he would have done with me if I had not escaped, I cannot say."

"It's a fair proposition that he would have murdered you before he was through," replied Ten-Ichi.

"Well, we will let that pass. The present question is: How did he get away from here and manage to take that image with him?"

Ten-Ichi grinned.

"I can think of but one way," he said. "That is, if the image is as big and as heavy as you thought it was."

"What is that?"

"Why, he has brought it to life again, and it walked away."

Nick turned quickly and smiled into Ten-Ichi's eyes.

"Is it possible, my lad, that you are making fun of your chief?" he asked, with mock solemnity.

"I was—and yet I was more than half in earnest, too," replied the young Jap.

"More than half in earnest, Ten-Ichi? Tell me exactly what you mean."

For a time Ten-Ichi was silent; then he said:

"Chief, would you mind *very* much if I do not explain exactly what I mean—just yet? Would you mind if we should search the ground around this cabin first, to see if there are any signs of a trail?"

"No; come along."

They passed outside the cabin and stood there at the door a moment, endeavoring to determine which direction Codman would have taken in making his escape from the cabin, for they were already satisfied that he had not ascended the path to the top of the cliff.

With that direction eliminated, there were only two others that he could have followed. He had either turned up the ravine, or down it. But which?

It will be remembered that the floor of the ravine where the cabin was located was of smooth, unimpressionable rock.

"We will go down the ravine a little way first," said the detective; and he led the way in that direction.

But they had gone only three or four hundred yards when they came to the edge of a precipice, where the stream that flowed through the ravine fell a distance of forty feet or more to the rocks below.

"It is a safe proposition that he did not take this direction," said Nick, coming to a halt. "We will return and try the other one."

They passed the cabin again, and after covering a hundred yards they came to a place where the rocky floor ended, and where they passed to one side of the stream, and so found themselves upon a pathway of soft earth.

It was Ten-Ichi who was in advance now, and he paused suddenly, with a sharp exclamation, and pointed toward the ground in front of him.

"Look!" he said.

"What is it?" asked the detective.

"Look!" repeated Ten-Ichi; and with surprise and consternation which he did not attempt to conceal, the detective did look.

Before them, deeply embedded in the soft soil, was the imprint of a naked foot, so large that none less than a giant in stature could have left it there; and beyond it, leading directly up the ravine, were others, showing by the spaces between them that the man or the thing that had made them had taken giant strides.

After the first moment of surprise was past, Nick Carter got down on his hands and knees, and examined the giant footprints one after another until he had studied several of them, and when he at last stood erect again he said:

"Ten-Ichi, there is one interesting and rather remarkable thing about those footprints."

"What is it?" asked the assistant.

"The foot that made them was hard and stiff; not pliable, like the foot of a man. If a natural foot had made them, the toes would have bent down and dug themselves into the soil in places."

Ten-Ichi nodded.

"These footprints are not like that," the detective continued. "The foot that left these marks here was firm and hard, as if it were made of stone, or iron."

"Or aluminum," said Ten-Ichi.

"Eh?" said the detective. "What do you mean by that?"

"Do you remember, chief," asked Ten-Ichi, "that while we were inside the cabin, when I suggested that the image might have walked away and you thought I was making fun, that I told you that I was more than half in earnest?"

"Yes; go on."

"And do you recall the fact that Codman told you that he had traveled in Tibet?"

"Yes."

"When I was a mere boy at home, I was the pupil of a wise old Samauri who had been held a prisoner in Tibet during his younger days. He was a prisoner there for years, and he used to tell me many strange tales of things that happened to him there. One of

those tales was about an image, or an idol, that walked."

"What is that? What are you talking about?"

"It is true. It was only a clever mechanical device; and this Samauri who taught me——"

The detective interrupted him with a gesture.

"Hark!" he said.

The noise that had reached his ears had also attracted the attention of Ten-Ichi, and now both of them leaped to their feet and stood gazing up the glen in the direction from which it came.

They stood in that attitude only a moment, when both uttered an exclamation of dismay.

Less than thirty yards distant from them, from a dense mass of alders, the giant image which had so puzzled the detective while he was a prisoner in the cabin strode into full view, and came to a stop, facing them. The right arm was extended, pointing threateningly at them.

CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GIANT.

There was perhaps two seconds of inactivity following upon the sudden appearance of the mysterious giant; and then Nick Carter suddenly threw up one hand and fired.

Nick is a dead shot, and he knew that his bullet struck the huge, white body directly over the heart.

Nevertheless, the figure did not fall; it did not even stagger, and the only result of the shot was a hollow-sounding laugh; and then, before the detective thought of firing a second time, the apparition turned and disappeared among the alders again.

Without an instant of hesitation the detective started forward on a run, closely followed by Ten-Ichi.

They reached the alders at the spot where the giant had appeared, and Nick, without stopping, forced his way among them only to discover that within a distance of thirty feet he was face to face with another precipice, which extended to a height of twenty feet, and over the top of which the stream which flowed through the ravine came tumbling in a volume of water and foam and spray.

And here, too, the floor of the glen was again of rock, so that the giant had left no traces of his gigantic feet.

For an instant the detective paused in dismay, and he asked himself the question:

"How and where and in what manner could the giant have disappeared so suddenly?"

It was unanswerable. The cliffs frowned upon them on every side. Where the falls came tumbling over the rocks, the height was twenty feet, at least; on either side they were a hundred feet in height, and there was no perceptible way of escape from the cul-de-sac thus formed.

Nick thought of the falls, and that possibly there might be a place of concealment behind them, and leaving Ten-Ichi he dashed up the rocks to a point from which he could obtain an unobstructed view behind the falling water.

It needed but one glance to tell him that the giant was not there, and that there was no cavern or grotto behind the falls in which he could have concealed himself.

Nevertheless, Nick was determined to make sure, and, although he became thoroughly soaked in the effort, he worked himself along the ledge of rocks until he stood almost behind the falls, and knew positively that even a child could not have hidden there.

When he returned to Ten-Ichi the detective was very quiet and very thoughtful, but the only remark he made was:

"Finish that story you were telling about the Samauri teacher, Ten-Ichi."

"The Samauri who taught me and who told me the tales was a prisoner, as I have said. He was practically a slave in the immediate service of the Grand Lama. The Tibetans are not idol-worshipers, as you know, but, nevertheless, there were five idols in the palace, each of which, at certain seasons of the year, was supposed to possess virtues peculiarly their own."

"Go on; you interest me."

"One of those idols was called Gumahr. It was a huge affair, made of an unknown metal to the Samauri, but which I now suppose must have been aluminum, for he described it as being very strong and not much heavier than paper. It is possible, chief, that the Tibetans discovered the secret of the manufacture of aluminum many years before it was generally known."

"Yes," said Nick. "It is within my recollection when aluminum was almost a precious metal, so expensive was it to produce. But go on."

"It was necessary that a man should be hidden inside the idol to operate it, and for years my teacher was compelled to do that work. He explained to me that once concealed inside, with the mechanism at his command, he could make the idol walk, could swing its arms, and work its jaws, and that whenever he

appeared with it before the people, they all fell upon their faces in mortal terror."

"I understand you, Ten-Ichi; but I will let you finish. What more?"

"Nothing more, only this Doctor Codman has traveled in that country. He told you that he spent some years there. What is more natural than that he should have returned here with a thorough knowledge of the mechanism of that idol Gumahr, and that he should have manufactured a replica of it for his own uses?"

"I think, Ten-Ichi, that you have hit upon the explanation of this business," said Nick.

"A bit of enamel paint, the use of some plaster of Paris and other ingredients might easily have given it the outward appearance of having been made from marble, in the cursory examination that you made of it."

"That is quite true, also. But aluminum is not hard enough to stop a bullet."

"No; but the image is large enough so that you might easily have missed the man who was concealed inside of it."

The detective was silent for a long time, and Ten-Ichi did not venture to speak. But at last Nick said:

"I was wondering about two things, Ten-Ichi."

"May I ask what they were, chief?"

"Certainly. I was wondering, first, how Codman could balance the image while he made it walk and do other things, for one thing; but most of all, I was trying to determine in my own mind how he managed to make it disappear so utterly and completely. The answer to the last question is, of course, obvious. It is that there is a hiding-place within twenty feet of this spot, which we have not had the wit to discover."

"As for the answer to the first question," said Ten-Ichi, "that is easy."

"How so?"

"The image itself is so light, notwithstanding its size, that the man concealed inside has only to balance himself in order to balance the image. If you had thought to test its weight when you saw it there in the cabin you would have discovered all this for yourself."

"Quite true, lad; quite true. And now we come to the second question again."

"Yes."

"We refuse to believe that the thing has wings, but that with a man concealed inside it, it can walk."

"Yes."

"But it hasn't got wings. It cannot fly, so where in blazes has it gone to? How has Codman, who was concealed inside the image when I fired at it, taken it away from this place and so escaped us?"

Ten-Ichi shook his head in perplexity.

"Codman could not have passed us in the glen without being seen by us, and there is absolutely no place here where he could have hidden his own body, let alone the huge frame of the aluminum giant."

Nick paused abruptly in his speech and leaped to his feet.

"I think I have the answer," he said, and started forward toward the base of the falls.

"What is it?" asked Ten-Ichi.

For answer, Nick pointed his finger silently at the basin of the deep water, the surface of which was changed into foam by the force of the waterfall which tumbled into it.

"Do you mean that he has gone into the water?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"There is no other place where he could have gone," replied the detective.

"But he would have been drowned," said his assistant.

"Who? The image—or the doctor?" asked Nick, with a strange smile.

"It is possible that the thing could have been rendered water-tight, chief."

"Quite possible. Anyhow, I am going to investigate."

"How?"

"I am going into the water. I am going to the bottom of that pool."

Ten-Ichi leaned forward and tested the temperature of the water.

"It is as cold as ice—almost," he said.

"That makes no difference," replied the detective; and he began to divest himself of his clothing.

That done, he seized the edge of the ledge of rocks that jutted over the basin, and let himself quickly down into the water until he was entirely immersed; and then he released his hold and sank out of sight.

He was gone only a moment, when he reappeared and pulled himself out upon the rocks, where he stood for a moment so that the warm sun could shine upon him—the last rays of the afternoon sun that would penetrate into the glen.

"It is very cold," he said. "I am accustoming myself to the temperature. I shall go back in a moment and search the bottom. Don't be anxious, Ten-Ichi, if I am gone longer than you think I should be."

Without awaiting a reply, he stepped to the edge of the pool and raising his hands over his head he dived out of sight into the foaming water.

Ten-Ichi took out his watch and studied the minute-hand, for he knew that under the circumstances time always seemed longer than it really was; and he counted the minutes slowly as they elapsed.

One minute; two minutes; three minutes.

Ten-Ichi closed his watch with a snap and began

also to remove his clothing. He felt that the time of his chief's absence was altogether too long.

When he was stripped he did not wait to temper his body to the water, but he dived into the depths of it at once, for Ten-Ichi is a wonderful swimmer, and during his boyhood his Samauri instructor had made him bathe in water when the ice had to be broken in order to enter it.

He dived and swam straight for the bottom; and the pool was very deep. But once at the bottom he turned his eyes upward and studied the rocks around him, for the sunlight happened to rest upon the surface of the pool at that moment, and there was sufficient light for him to see comparatively well.

And he discovered the thing for which he searched.

It was a fissure in the rocks which did not extend quite to the surface of the pool; but a fissure nevertheless, and of sufficient breadth to admit of the passage of a horse had one been there to attempt it.

Men think quickly under such circumstances, and instantly Ten-Ichi decided that through that fissure, and there only, could the image have gone, if it had descended into the pool; and through that place only could Nick Carter have disappeared, since there was no sign of him elsewhere in the pool.

He was only the briefest instant in determining these points, and then he impelled his own body forward toward the fissure, entered it, discovered that

there was more light beyond, and in another second or two he rose to the surface of a second pool where the water was not agitated; a second pool where the rocks had been worn away in a circular form which was almost like a huge well, and into which centuries ago the waters of the stream he had just left behind him must have fallen.

But that was not all.

Nick Carter was there, standing upon the shelving rock beside the pool, gazing upward at a series of steps which had been cut into the rocks, and where a rope that was fastened somewhere at the top dangled a few feet over the brow of the cliff, fifty feet above his head.

The detective heard Ten-Ichi's approach and turned to greet him.

"Codman has climbed those steps with the aid of the rope, and he has pulled it up after him," he said. "I was just figuring it out. He has probably got outside of his giant and carried it while he was climbing. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, one thing is sure. Without the aid of that rope neither of us can climb that cliff, so the only thing left for us to do is to return. Possibly we can make our way round to the top and so find his trail. Come!"

With the detective leading the way they dived again

into the pool, and presently they climbed out together where they had left their clothing.

In a few moments they were again fully clad; and then, as they were about to start away, they heard a terrified scream followed by a wild call for help. And the voice was Patsy's.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIGHT IN THE WOODS.

It did not take Nick Carter long to reach the foot of the path, and to ascend it to the ledge where Patsy had been left in charge of the automobile, after he heard that cry and the call for help that had followed it, and when he did he discovered Patsy lying at full-length on the rocks, close to the edge of the precipice.

Blood was trickling from a deep cut just above his right temple, and the automobile was no longer there.

For one instant the detective came to a halt and listened, and he fancied that far off he could hear the panting of the motor; but he was not certain of this, and anyhow it was necessary that he should give his immediate attention to Patsy.

The lad was unconscious. Indeed, at the first glance, Nick was not sure that he still lived; but a moment's inspection reassured him.

Patsy had evidently been felled by a heavy blow which had cut a deep gash in his head; but he lived and he breathed—and five minutes later, after a few drops of brandy had been administered to him and his wound had been bathed with cool water, he opened

his eyes and looked around him with frightened, disturbed eyes.

"Where is it?" he murmured.

"Where is what?" asked the detective.

"The monster—the giant—the thing that attacked me," he replied, and shuddered at the recollection of his encounter.

"Was it the giant?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"And it frightened you?"

Patsy shuddered again.

"It is only a clever mechanical device, Patsy," explained the detective. And then he told the young assistant all about what they had discovered, and what had happened to Ten-Ichi and himself since they parted. And it was remarkable how quickly Patsy recovered after that.

"I was asleep," he explained. "The thing came upon me suddenly. I yelled and called for help, and then I got a swipe over the head that laid me out. That's all I know."

As soon as Patsy was able to travel, they started in pursuit of the automobile.

"I am afraid that the wily doctor has given us the slip—for a time," he said, as they hurried in the direction of the main road. "I wonder if he is making the giant run the machine for him, or if he has packed it in the tonneau?"

Ten-Ichi chuckled.

"If he is sitting on the front seat, inside that naked image and should happen to meet anybody on the road, there will be some frightened people in this section of the country," he said; and Nick agreed with him.

At a distance of a hundred yards before they arrived at the main road they found the automobile, where Codman had abandoned it because of two exploded tires. It was evident that he had attempted to make too much speed over the uneven going, and that the punctured tires were the consequence.

"Come," said Nick. "This is not so bad. I think we have got him now, if we are patient."

He at once began a painstaking examination of the road, and he very quickly discovered Codman's trail.

"Follow me, both of you," he said. "The doctor has gotten outside of his image. He must be carrying it, and although it is not heavy, it is clumsy. We should have no difficulty in overtaking him now that he is afoot."

The trail in some places was quite easy to follow; in others it was extremely difficult to cling to it. It took them directly to the main road, and straight across it into the forest on the opposite side; and here they lost it entirely.

The detective paused for a moment, at a loss what course to pursue. Presently he said:

"There is only one thing to do. We must spread out. Patsy, you go a hundred yards down the road, and then, when I give the signal to start, dive straight into the woods. Ten-Ichi, you go the same distance in the other direction. I will take the center."

Had the time not been in the month of June, and not far from the longest day in the year, it must have been quite dark by this time; as it was, there was still more than half an hour of daylight left to them, and Nick was determined to make the most of it.

He was determined to capture Codman if it was a possible thing to accomplish it, for he felt now more forcibly than ever before that the Poison Doctor should not be left at large.

His mind recurred to the scenes in the cabin when he was a prisoner in Codman's hands. He recalled all that the doctor had said about the secret of life, and all the things he had done with his mechanical statue; and there was not a doubt in his own mind but that Codman believed that he could transform that statue into a living being.

This, then, was the phase that his dementia had taken. This, then, accounted for all that he had said to the detective, and all that he had done.

Nick believed that he had worked in perfect good faith with himself when he had spent so much time in raising and lowering the arms of the image, and

attempting meanwhile to breathe into it the breath of life.

"He is a mad physician, sane on every subject but one," thought the detective, as he gave the signal to his companions, and started into the woods.

The forest was almost primeval in character. Between the larger growth of trees an almost impenetrable undergrowth flourished, and in many places it was almost all that Nick could do to force his way through it.

Now and then as he advanced he came to a space that was more or less open; and it was just after he had crossed one of these natural clearings that the incident happened which came near to resulting in disaster.

Nick had crossed the partly open space, and had stopped, facing a dense mass of undergrowth. He was determining in his own mind whether he should attempt to force his way through it, or, by making a détour, skirt it, and so intent was his mind upon the subject that he did not hear the approach of stealthy footsteps behind him.

Of a sudden something—a heavy body—alighted squarely upon his shoulders, and despite his efforts to maintain his position, he was forced to the ground, and at the same instant a heavy hand with a grip like iron seized him by the throat and effectually

choked back all possibility of his crying out to warn his companions.

Codman was fully as strong as Nick Carter, if, indeed, he was not even stronger. The detective realized this thoroughly; and now that he had permitted himself to be taken at a disadvantage his instant thought was that he must struggle as he had never done before if he hoped to gain the mastery of this madman who had attacked him in the rear.

When Codman, having alighted on the detective's back, seized him by the throat, Nick Carter instantly did two things:

He shut his jaws tightly together, and thus distended to their utmost capacity the muscles of his neck, and so offset the effort to strangle him—and he reached both his hands upward and backward and grasped the hair of Codman's head in each of them.

In that way he pulled the doctor's head down against his own shoulders, and held it there so firmly and so tightly that Codman was in even more danger of being smothered than Nick was of being strangled.

Codman could not strike the detective, for he dared not loosen the grasp upon his throat for one thing, lest Nick would call out to his companions; and he dared not loosen the other arm, which was around Nick's body, lest he should be unhorsed, so to speak.

When Nick fell he fell to his knees; and because both his hands were grasping Codman's hair, he pitched

forward until his forehead touched the ground—or, rather, the thick layer of moss which covered the ground; and it can readily be seen that this position placed the doctor somewhat at a disadvantage.

Nick realized it, and he strained himself for a final effort, for he knew that the battle must be won quickly or not at all.

He waited a brief interval while he pulled himself together; and then, putting every ounce of muscle that he possessed into that final effort that he had decided upon, and with his forehead still digging into the moss, he raised himself first upon one foot and then the other.

Then, counting one, two, three to himself, he gave a mighty jerk with his hands; a jerk that would have torn Codman's scalp from his head had the man not released his hold around Nick's body.

But he did release it. He could not do otherwise; and having released it, his body described a semi-circle in the air.

It flew over Nick Carter's head like a whip-lash, the grip upon Nick's throat was torn away, and Codman himself landed with the small of his back across a fallen tree so that the wind was effectually knocked out of him, and for an instant he lay as one who was gasping away his last breath.

Instantly the detective was upon his feet. Just as suddenly he brought his handcuffs into play, and

in two seconds Codman was bound and helpless before his captor.

Then it was that Nick called to the others, and when they came to him they were astounded to discover that the search was ended.

Codman recovered slowly from the effects of the fall that Nick had given him, and a strange feature of his recovery was that he would not utter a word.

Although Nick talked to him and questioned him, he would make no sound whatever; and although that night, and for many days thereafter, the forest around that locality were thoroughly searched, no trace whatever of the mechanical giant could be found. The doctor had succeeded in hiding it so effectually that, so far as we know, it is still hidden.

There was an extra tire with Nick's car, and still another extra one with the car that Patsy had driven to the hotel, and with these they repaired the big automobile; and, bound hand and foot so that there was no possibility of his escaping, Doctor Codman was taken to New York and lodged in a cell at police headquarters.

CHAPTER XXI.

CODMAN'S MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS.

It was the morning of the fifteenth of June.

Nick Carter was reading his paper and smoking his after-breakfast cigar when he was called to the telephone.

"Hello!" said Nick. "Who is it?"

"The first deputy commissioner of police," was the reply.

"Ah! Commissioner, how are you?"

"Nicely, thank you. How are you?"

"Never better. What can I do for you, commissioner?"

"Nothing especial; only an accident has occurred this morning of which I think you ought to be informed."

"Indeed! What was it?"

"It was you, was it not, who arrested Doctor Codman, the poisoner?"

"Yes. Has he made another escape?"

"Hardly that; but he was found in his cell this morning in almost a dying condition."

"Has he swallowed some of his own poisons, do you think?"

"That we don't know. The physician who has attended thinks not; and, besides——"

"Yes."

"You know, do you not, that he was thoroughly searched before he was put into a cell?"

"Certainly. I superintended the search myself."

"Yes. That was my understanding of the matter. How thorough was that search, Carter?"

"As thorough as I could make it, knowing the man as well as I do. We stripped him entirely before we finished with him."

"And you are positive, I suppose, that he could have had no poisons concealed about him?"

"As positive as I could be."

"Then, doubtless, the physician who attended him is right, and the illness is due to natural causes."

"How does the physician diagnose the case, commissioner?"

"To be entirely frank with you, Carter, he does not diagnose the case very clearly. He admits himself that he does not. He says that there are many puzzling symptoms, but he seems to have no doubt that it will develop, during the day, into a form of acute Bright's."

"Humph!" said Nick. "What has been done with him?"

"He was removed to the hospital an hour ago."

"To the prison ward, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Did you see the man yourself?"

"Yes."

"How were you impressed by his appearance, commissioner?"

"I thought him to be a very sick man, indeed."

"Has any person been to see him? Has he been permitted to see anybody at all?"

"He sent for a lawyer yesterday morning, I am told; the morning after his arrest."

"Were the two left alone together?"

"Not exactly."

"Just what do you mean by that expression?"

"I mean that they were not for an instant unobserved by the guard, although he remained far enough away from them so that he could not overhear what was said."

"But he kept his eyes upon them all the time?"

"He asserts that he did so; yes."

"And he saw nothing pass between them?"

"Nothing—so he says."

"And just what do you wish me to do?"

"I thought that possibly it would be well if you should go around to the hospital and take a look at the man."

"I will do so."

"All right. That is all, I believe, Carter."

"Shall you remain at headquarters during the forenoon, commissioner?"

"Yes."

"In that case I will call around to see you when I leave the hospital."

"All right. Thank you. I shall be glad if you will do so."

The detective replaced the receiver on the hook, and wheeled his chair around so that he faced his chief assistant, who was seated at the opposite side of the room.

"Chick," he said, "you heard one side of that conversation, didn't you?"

"Yes. And I can imagine quite well what the other side was."

"Good. Do you care to go around to the hospital with me?"

"Yes. I would like to do so."

The detective turned again to the telephone and ordered his automobile brought around at once. Then he said:

"Get yourself into some sort of disguise that will make you look like a medical student, Chick. I will rig myself out as a visiting physician. It will be just as well for our interview if Codman doesn't recognize us. The car will be here in about ten minutes."

Fifteen minutes later Nick and his assistant leaped

into the car, and a few moments later they came to a stop in front of the residence of Doctor Stag.

"Stag," said the detective, as soon as he was admitted to the presence of the physician, "can I tear you away from your patients for half an hour or less?"

"Quite impossible, Carter. I'm sorry, but—well, it can't be done, that's all. What's up?"

"It's Codman," replied the detective.

"What! Again?"

"Yes."

"Has he escaped?"

"Not quite; but I think he is fixing to do it."

"Where is he?"

"At the hospital."

"What is the matter?"

"That is what I wanted you to tell me, doctor. The only physician who has attended him—and I don't yet know who that is—doesn't seem to quite know, although he talks about some form of acute Bright's."

"Does, eh? There is only one form of it, I think."

"I'd like to have you see Codman, doctor," insisted Nick.

Doctor Stag pondered a moment. Then he said:

"Wait until I see who is waiting." And he stepped into his reception-room. He was absent several moments, and when he returned he wore his hat.

"Come along," he said. "I have begged half an

hour from my patients. Get me back here as soon as possible, won't you?"

"Sure thing."

After the lapse of another ten minutes the automobile stopped in front of the hospital, and in three more, Nick, Chick and Doctor Stag were standing beside the cot upon which the famous—or, rather, the infamous—Doctor Codman was lying.

The man appeared to be only semiconscious. He looked up at his visitors with heavy, unseeing eyes. The flush of fever was on his face. Only a glance was required to determine the fact that he was a very sick man.

Doctor Stag felt of his pulse; he listened to the beating of his heart; he looked at his tongue, took his temperature, and did a dozen other things which doctors do in an effort to diagnose a case.

He asked a few questions of the sick man, to some of which he received intelligent replies and to many of which he did not; Nick and Chick remained discreetly in the background, studying the sick man the while.

At last Stag looked toward Nick and nodded, and after a moment more they withdrew.

Doctor Stag paused for a moment in the office, where he held a short consultation with the house physician, and then again nodding toward the detective, they returned to the automobile, and the great

physician was whirled rapidly back to his office. But he found time on his way to say to the detective:

"There is no doubt whatever, Carter, that Codman is a very sick man; nor is there the least doubt in my mind that his illness is due to natural causes."

"You don't think, then, that he has managed to swallow one of his poisons?" asked the detective.

"If he has done so, there is not the slightest evidence of it."

"You feel quite positive about that?"

"Entirely so."

"How do you diagnose the case, doctor?"

"I don't diagnose it—yet. I shall return there, after my office hours, to make a thorough examination of the man. It was that subject that I was discussing with the house physician. I asked him if he would personally assist me."

"Which, of course, he was only too glad to do."

"Certainly."

"But at present you don't think that there is any Tommyrot about this, eh?"

"No; I do not."

"After you have made your second examination, will you call me up on the phone or drop in to see me and tell me about it?"

"Certainly. I will stop at your house—say about four or five this afternoon."

"All right. Thank you. I will expect you."

"I'll be there, Carter."

"And, in the meantime, you think that we need feel no anxiety about Codman?—about his escaping, I mean. It would be a good thing for himself and all concerned if he would cash in and quit."

"I don't think that you need feel any present anxiety about the immediate happening of either event," replied the doctor.

"All right. With that assurance, I will be content."

After he left Doctor Stag at his door, Nick drove the machine directly to headquarters, but only to discover that the deputy commissioner had been unexpectedly called away; so he left a note for him in which he said that he would call again that evening, and returned to his home.

He did not leave the house again that day, and when five o'clock in the afternoon arrived it found him pacing the floor of his study, in deep thought, while he awaited the arrival of Doctor Stag.

But Doctor Stag did not come; and at seven o'clock a telegram arrived from him. It said:

"I have been compelled to defer that examination until to-morrow morning."

Nick crumpled the message in his hand and scowled. He had serious misgivings, although he did not voice them.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DRUGGED TOBACCO.

Again the hour was immediately after breakfast; again Nick Carter and Chick were seated in the study; again the telephone-bell rang, and again it was the deputy commissioner at the other end of the wire.

"That you, Carter?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What do you think about it?"

"About what?"

"Codman."

"What about him?"

"He has disappeared."

"What!"

"It seems to be a fact."

"When did he go, and how did he get away?"

"We don't know when, and we don't know exactly how. All that we do know is that the two night attendants who have charge of that ward awoke apparently from a sound sleep at, or near, daylight this morning, and they found that Codman's cot was empty. That is all that is known about the incident at present."

"What put them to sleep?"

"They don't know; or they insist that they do not."

"I will have a talk with them."

"Yes; I think you had better do that."

"They should be off duty now. Where can I find them?"

"Right here. I had them brought to me at once."

"All right. I'll be with you inside of half an hour."

"By the way, Carter, you didn't call here last evening, as your note said you would do?"

"There was apparently no necessity for it. Stag wired me that he would have to defer the examination he intended to make, until this morning, and he had assured me that I need have no misgivings about Codman; that he was a very sick man—and all that."

"Very good. Get down here as soon as you can, won't you?"

"I will start at once."

When the detective entered the office of the deputy commissioner somewhat later, he found the two attendants there awaiting him, and with a nod of greeting to the commissioner, he began to question the men at once.

"How do you divide your time when you are on duty in the ward?" was the first question he asked, and he directed it toward the one who appeared to be the more intelligent of the two.

"I take the north end of the ward; my companion takes the south end," was the reply.

"You are both on duty all night?"

"Yes; from eight o'clock until six in the morning."

"There is a door of communication at each extremity of the ward, is there not?"

"Yes. When there is nothing to do I am seated at one of the doors. Morton is seated at the other one."

"You each make certain rounds during the night, do you not?"

"Every half-hour."

"Tell me how that is done."

"On the even hour I pass through the ward and inspect the occupant of every cot, or, rather, I inspect every cot which is occupied."

"I understand."

"Morton does the same at the half-hour."

"And while one of you is engaged in making the inspection, what is the other one about?"

"He is merely at his station at the door."

"Suppose one of the patients calls to you during the night; who responds?"

"If the call comes from my half of the ward, I respond; if it comes from Morton's, he attends to it."

"If I remember correctly, Codman's cot was located in your half of the ward?"

"Yes."

"And not very far from your door?"

"The third from the door, on the west side; yes, sir."

"Did he call you to his cot during the night?"

"No, sir."

"Were you called away from the door by any of the patients, during the night?"

"Several times."

"Could Codman have made his escape while you were responding to such a call, without your being aware of it?"

"Certainly not; and, besides, sir, you must remember that both doors are kept securely locked at all times, night and day."

"You and Morton both dropped asleep, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. I never did such a thing before in——"

"Never mind that. What time was it, do you suppose?"

"I don't know, sir; and I cannot imagine——"

"We haven't got to that yet. Reply to my questions, and don't volunteer remarks."

"Yes, sir."

"What time was it when you last observed Codman, on his cot?"

"One o'clock, sir."

"Are you positive about that?"

"I am."

Nick turned to Morton.

"What time was it when *you* last noticed Codman?" he asked.

"Half-past twelve, sir."

Nick returned to the other attendant.

"What was Codman's condition when you last noticed him, at one o'clock?" he asked.

"The same as it had been since he was brought there. He was apparently in a semistupor. I don't think his position or attitude was changed at all."

"What induced you to go to sleep?"

"I have not the most remote idea, sir. I really have not."

"And you, Morton?"

"I don't know any more about it than you do, sir," was the reply.

Nick turned to Masters—that was his name—again.

"What did you eat, or drink, during the night?" he asked sternly.

"Nothing, sir. Nothing at all."

"Is that the truth?"

"It is, and it applies to Morton as well as myself."

"Where were you when you dropped asleep?"

"Seated in my chair near the door."

"How long have you been a night attendant in that ward?"

"Four years, sir. Morton and I went there at the same time; within a week of each other."

"Do you think it was between one o'clock and half-past one when you dropped off to sleep, Masters?"

"I think it must have been then; yes, sir. Morton says that he remembers seeing me make my rounds at one o'clock, so he must have been affected at the same time I was."

"Did any one approach you at that time, or near that time?"

"No, sir."

"Did any one enter the ward from the outside during the night?"

"No, sir."

"Did anything that was at all unusual happen to you, or happen inside the ward, at any time before you dropped asleep?"

"No, sir."

"You say you were called to one or another of the cots several times during the first part of the night?"

"Yes."

"Did you take anything, or swallow anything at all at any time between eight o'clock and one o'clock?"

"Not a blessed thing, sir. And Morton says the same."

Nick studied the man narrowly for a few moments; then he said:

"I observe that you chew tobacco?"

"Yes. It helps to pass the time; and, of course, we cannot smoke on duty."

"Does Morton also chew?"

"Yes."

"What kind of tobacco do you chew?"

"Plug. Usually I chew a brand that is called Honeycomb, but I remember now that I tried a new kind last night."

Nick Carter was instantly interested.

"How did that happen?" he asked.

"Well, sir, it was this way—though I don't see——"

"You don't have to see. Just tell me exactly how it happened that you tried a new brand of chewing-tobacco last night. Men who chew tobacco usually stick to their favorite brand, and are not given to making experiments with others."

"That is quite true, sir."

"I know it is. Now explain, if you please."

"Well, sir, I usually get around to the hospital about six. I have some trifling things to attend to before I go on duty."

"Well?"

"It was a quarter to eight last night when I suddenly discovered that I didn't have enough tobacco to last me through the night, so I left the hospital and ran to the corner, where I am in the habit of buying it, to get some. When I got there the man who

keeps the place says to me, 'Masters, I've got a new brand here to-night that they tell me is fine. I wish you would give it a try.'

"'I like my own kind best,' says I; but he up and tells me that he will make me a present of a couple of plugs if I will try it; and he reaches into a box on the shelf and puts two plugs in front of me.

"Well, sir, I ain't none too flush with money, so I thanks him, takes the plugs, and walks out, but I happened to have a chew in my mouth at the time, so I didn't take any just then. In fact, I forgot all about it until along some time in the night, when my own supply gave out. It was then that I remembered the two plugs that had been given to me. Oh, I remember now exactly how it happened."

"How was that?" asked Nick.

"Morton came across to my end of the ward and asked me for a chew, his own being out, he said. I told him about the new kind and gave him one of the plugs. He bit off a chew of it and went back to his own end of the ward."

"Do you remember when that happened, Morton?" asked the detective sharply.

"Yes, sir. When I was making my half-past twelve inspection."

"Good! We are getting at it now. When did you take a chew of the new kind of tobacco, Masters?"

"It was some time after that, sir. I think, now that

you call my attention to it, that it was when I started on my one-o'clock round."

"Precisely," said Nick. "The mystery is explained. The tobacco that was given to you was drugged. Nothing could be simpler. Commissioner, I wish you would send a detective sergeant to that tobacconist and have him brought here without delay, will you?"

"I certainly will;" and the commissioner pressed an electric button and gave the order.

"And have the sergeant bring that box of plug tobacco along with him, please," said Nick.

"Now, Masters," said the detective, "we have discovered how it was that you were drugged; and now I will ask you a few more questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember to have talked with a stranger, yesterday afternoon or evening, before you went on duty?"

"Let me see. Yes, I think I did. Just one."

"When and where was that?"

"It was while I was on my way to the hospital. I dropped into a beer-saloon, where I am in the habit of going, to get a glass of beer, and, while I was standing at the bar talking with the proprietor, a stranger came into the place. He stepped up to the bar and ordered a beer, and, as he did so, he asked the boss to take something, and, seeing me there, he included me in the invitation. I accepted. That was

all. He was the only stranger with whom I exchanged a word."

"Do you remember if you took a chew of tobacco while you stood there?"

"Yes, I did; and now that you remind me of it, the stranger asked me for a chew, and I remember now that we had some talk about tobacco at the time, too. Say! It's mighty funny, and I had clean forgotten it; but now I remember that he mentioned the very brand which that dealer afterward gave me, as being his favorite chew. He advised me to try it if I had a chance. I had clean forgotten it."

"Didn't you recall that conversation when the dealer gave you the two plugs?"

"Yes; I think I did remember it. I think that was one reason why I accepted it."

"Didn't the stranger ask you to try some at the time you were in the saloon?"

"No; he didn't have any. He was out. That was why he asked me for a chew."

"No; that was not the reason why. He asked you for a chew because he wanted to see what sort of a supply you had in your pocket."

"Eh?"

"He wished to figure out in his own mind just about how long your own supply would last, so that he could tell at about what time you would tackle a

new plug, if you had one. The whole game is very clear to me now."

"Tell me how you figure it out, Carter," interposed the commissioner; and the two attendants stared, for neither had known until that moment that they were talking to Nick Carter.

"This way, commissioner," replied Nick. "Tobacco-chewers, the world over, have certain habits which I have noticed are common to all of them. One of those habits is that they never bite into a new plug until the old one is consumed."

"That is true, sir," Masters interjected.

"The man who asked Masters for a chew, in the saloon, knew that perfectly well. His object in asking for a chew was to discover how much tobacco Masters had on hand."

"He might have had an extra plug in his pocket," said the commissioner.

"True enough; but that would have made no difference, for, if Masters had had half a dozen plugs of his own kind of tobacco in his pocket, and were given a plug of another kind to try, he would make the trial before he bit into a fresh plug of his own, and he would *not* make the trial until he had finished the plug that was already more than half-consumed."

"Do *you* chew tobacco, Mr. Carter?" asked Masters.

"No; but I know several persons who do."

"Well, you are dead right about their peculiar habits."

"I know I am. Now, commissioner, when the stranger saw that Masters had about a half or a third of a plug of his own kind left in his pocket, he instantly figured out that if he was given a new kind, he would bite off a chew from it some time during the night. He would get to the new plug at some time between midnight and dawn. See?"

"Yes. I understand. But what about Morton? Did you see any stranger, Morton, or have any tobacco conversation with anybody?"

"No, sir."

The commissioner turned again to the detective.

"What about Morton?" he repeated.

"It was not at all necessary that the stranger should know anything about Morton's supply," replied Nick. "It is only a coincidence that his supply gave out and that he crossed the room to ask Masters for a chew."

"I don't follow you at all."

"The fact is this: If his supply had not given out —if he had not crossed the room and asked for a chew, Masters would have gone over to him when he tried the new plug, and have asked him to give it a try also. Isn't that right, Masters?"

"As sure as you are alive, sir."

"He would want another opinion than his own; and, besides, he had two plugs given to him; it is more

than likely that he would have passed one of them on to Morton, in any event, for the two men are friends, and, I have no doubt, often borrowed a chew of one another."

"You're dead right, Mr. Carter," said Masters. "That is exactly what I would have done."

"Is it all clear to you now, commissioner?" asked Nick.

"Yes; only it strikes me as being rather far-fetched."

"I don't think so. It is merely the result of a careful study of human nature. Masters, have you that plug of tobacco here with you now?"

"Yes. Here it is."

"Have you used any more of it? But I see you have not."

"No; I didn't like it at all. There is a bitter taste to it which I don't like. I was about to take a bite out of it a little while ago, but I happened to be passing a cigar-store at the time, so I went in and got some of my own kind."

"How about you, Morton?" asked Nick.

"One chew of it was enough for me. It is too bitter. Tastes like hog-weed to me."

"Well, it is lucky that you have not tried it again. You would both be asleep now, if you had done so. Now, Masters?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you wake up?"

"Just at daylight."

"That would be about four o'clock, or a little after."

"Just about four, sir."

"Did you feel badly?"

"No, sir. Just as usual."

"It did not occur to you that you had been drugged?"

"Not at all."

"How soon did you discover the absence of Codman?"

"It was Morton who made the discovery, sir, although Codman was nearest to my station. You see, he woke a minute or two before I did, and I opened my eyes just as he was coming toward me on the run. His face was pale and he looked scared, and it brought me up standing. I asked him what was the matter, and he told me that his door was unlocked, that the key was in the lock—and then, of course, he pointed to Codman's bed."

"It was empty, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did Codman get out of the building?"

"Just nacherly walked out, sir."

"How was that?"

"The night-watchman at the door will tell you that the man came to him, fully dressed. and demanded

to be let out. He said very plainly that he was Doctor Codman, of Stoneyhedge Court, and that he had been detained in the hospital by a patient who was in a private room. He looked like a doctor——"

"He is a doctor."

"He looked like a doctor, and he gave the watchman one of his engraved cards. The watchman let him out and thought no more about it. He doesn't even remember what time it was, for he didn't look to see."

The detective turned to the commissioner again.

"You can understand how that was done?" he asked.

"Perfectly. I don't think that any real blame attaches to the watchman. The puzzle is, how did Codman secure his clothing?"

"That was easy," replied Nick. "Codman has been for a long time a practising physician in New York City. I have no doubt that the interior of that hospital is as familiar to him as the inside of his own house, or office. He would know exactly where his clothing had been put—and the rest was easy."

"But the man was sick almost unto death. He was lying in a half-stupor," remonstrated the commissioner.

"That was probably simulated," said Nick.

"Could he simulate it well enough to fool a man like Stag?"

"It appears that he *did* do it; or else he knew how to obtain access to the medicine-chest and knew also that there was a drug there which was an antidote to the poison he had taken. We will never know the full explanation of what has happened until Codman is recaptured, commissioner."

"And not even then, unless he chooses to tell us."

"Oh, he will tell, all right. Trust his egotism for that."

"Anyhow, we haven't recaptured him yet."

"No," said Nick slowly; "but we will."

"For the present, at least, he has disappeared, Carter."

"Quite so; and the first reappearance he will make will not be far from the spot where he concealed his mechanical giant. You know about that, don't you?"

"Yes, I heard a lot about it; but I do not believe half that I heard."

"Well, you may believe it—all. The thing is so perfectly and so wonderfully made that it fooled even me for a time. I thought at first that it was alive; then I thought it was made of marble, and it was not until later that I discovered what it really is."

"It escaped you, all the same, didn't it?"

"Yes. He managed to conceal it somewhere so that we could not find it."

"Well, Carter, don't you think that if it is your opinion that Codman will go directly after his giant,

somebody should be sent to that neighborhood at once to watch out for him?"

"I have already attended to that," replied Nick.

"You have?"

"Yes; all three of my assistants have gone there—and they should be almost there by this time."

"Good! I only hope that they will catch him. The escape reflects upon the department, Carter, in a way that is annoying; extremely so, in fact."

"Oh, we'll catch him," said Nick. "My only fear is——" He paused.

"What?"

"That his later experiences will have a bad effect upon his temper. I am afraid that he will be inclined to cut loose, now. You see, up to the present time, he has not committed any very serious crime that we know about. He has only made what we call attempts; but now he realizes that he is a hunted man—that every hand is against him, *and I am afraid that he will do things.*"

What the commissioner might have said in reply is not known, for at that moment the sergeant, who had been sent after the tobacconist, returned with him in tow; and a more genuinely frightened man it would have been hard to find.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CODMAN'S PLOT TO ESCAPE.

"Sit there," said Nick Carter to the tobacconist. "What is your name?"

"Poacher, sir. Samuel Poacher."

"What is that you have in your hands?"

"The box of tobacco, sir, that you ordered me to bring here."

"The same box from which you presented two plugs to Mr. Masters, yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many plugs have been taken from the box altogether?"

"Only three, sir."

"Who received the third?"

"I took it myself, sir. I only took one chew from it, just as I was closing up, last night."

"Did you sleep soundly?"

"I should say I did, sir. I sleep in the little room back of my store, and I woke up this morning about daylight, on top of the bed, with my clothes all on me. I didn't even stop to undress."

"Are you telling me the truth, Poacher?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get that box of tobacco?"

"A man came into my store about seven o'clock last night, who said he was the agent for it. He wanted to sell me a box, but I told him I had all the supply I wanted. Then he said as how it was a very fine and high-priced brand, and that I ought to have it. I still said I didn't want it, and then he told me that he was broke, and said that I could have the whole box for fifty cents, so I took it."

"Describe the man's appearance," said Nick.

"Well, sir, he was about as tall as you. He had red hair and watery eyes and a bristling, red mustache. He wore a blue serge coat, and——"

"Is that the man, Masters?" interrupted Nick.

"Yes, sir; that's him, all right."

"How did you happen to give two plugs of that particular tobacco to Mr. Masters?" the detective demanded sternly of Poacher.

"There wasn't any particular reason, sir. Mr. Masters is a good customer of mine, and I felt that I could afford to, seeing as how the whole box only cost me fifty cents. He wanted some tobacco, and I thought if I could get him to chewing that box of it, I would more than get my money back. Chewers don't take kindly to new tobacco, but I knew that Morton would chew what Masters did, and so——"

"That will do. Are you quite sure that the man who left the tobacco there said nothing to you about Masters?"

"He didn't say a word about anybody; but I do remember one thing about him."

"You do, eh? What was that?"

"Why, he came into the store a second time, a few minutes after Masters went out."

"What did he want then?"

"Wanted to buy back that box of tobacco; said he had struck a raise since he was in before and that he really couldn't afford to let the tobacco go so cheap. He offered me a dollar for it, and finally two dollars; but I wouldn't have it. I thought if it was such a good thing I had better hang on to it."

"What else?"

"He said he was sorry. He also asked me if I chewed, and when I said that I did, sometimes, he advised me to try some of it myself before I went to bed. He told me to take a chew of it when I closed up, just to see how I liked it."

"Anything more?"

"No; only what he said about Masters."

"What was that?"

"You see, he came in right after Masters went out, and so, after a little, he asked who that man was who had just gone out."

"Well?"

"I told him, and he shook his head, saying it couldn't be the one. Then he explained that he thought he had recognized him, but he was mistaken.

Then he leaned over the counter and remarked that two plugs were gone from the box, and I told him that I had given Masters two of the plugs."

"Anything more?"

"Nothing, only that he asked me, carelesslike, if Masters had bought any other tobacco."

"You told him that he had not, of course?"

"Certainly."

"And then——"

"Then he went away. I haven't seen him since."

"I think that is all, Mr. Poacher. You may go now; but you may leave that box of tobacco here."

"I hope that I am in no trouble, sir."

"No; but you came mighty close to it. My advice to you is not to accept any more goods in the manner in which you became possessed of this."

"You bet your life I won't. Whatever has happened I can't imagine, but, whatever it is, I meant no harm, sir."

"I can see that quite plainly. You may go now."

When he had gone, Nick turned again to Masters.

"You see," he said, "that your friend of the saloon hurried to that store where he knew you supplied yourself with tobacco, the moment you parted. Then, after he had persuaded Poacher to take the box, he remained near watching to see if you would get some of it. He was probably looking in through the window when you did get it, and when you again came

out he attempted to buy the box back again so that the whole neighborhood would not be drugged. Afterward, inasmuch as he remembered the size of your partly consumed plug, he was able to figure out, with some degree of accuracy, about the time when you might be expected to go to sleep.

"That, I think, is the whole story, commissioner," continued the detective, "save that the red-headed man of the tobacco plot was doubtless waiting outside the hospital, with some sort of conveyance at hand, when Codman appeared."

"But how was it possible for all the details of this plot to be arranged. Codman has not been permitted to see anybody."

"You told me over the phone that he had seen a lawyer."

"Oh, yes. But a reputable lawyer would not lend himself to anything of this kind."

"Do you know that he *was* a reputable lawyer?"

"No; to tell you the truth, I do not."

"Do you know, in fact, that he was a lawyer at all?"

"I have only the turnkey's word for it, of course, although I have seen a card that he left behind him. Stay, I think I have it here."

He searched among the papers on his desk and presently passed a card over to the detective.

"Sol Solmenstein, Attorney and Counselor at Law,

No. —— Broadway, New York City," the detective read aloud. That seems to be straight enough on the face of it. Let me have your telephone directory for a moment, commissioner."

It was passed to him, and presently he said:

"At least, he has no telephone."

He turned then to the instrument and asked the information bureau to give him the telephone number of that address on Broadway, after which he called it up and asked for the superintendent of the building. The answer came presently, and then Nick asked:

"Is there a lawyer in your building, who either has an office or desk-room there, whose name is Sol Solmenstein?"

"No, sir," came the instant reply. "There is only one lawyer in the entire building, and he is a patent-lawyer, named Brown."

"You don't happen to know about a man with the name I have inquired about, do you?"

"No, sir. Never heard the name before."

Nick thanked him, hung up the receiver, and called for the city directory, only to find that it did not contain the name Solmenstein at all.

"You see," he said to the commissioner, putting it aside, "Codman fooled you. Instead of sending for a lawyer, he sent for one of his confederates, and, doubtless, notwithstanding the fact that they were watched, the man who called himself Solmenstein

managed to bring him the drug he used in his pretended illness."

"Yes; I see it all now—when it is too late," was the reply.

"You must not forget, commissioner, that it is no mistake of yours. You did not attend to this matter personally."

"That is quite true."

"I haven't any doubt," continued the detective, "that Sol Solmenstein and the man who borrowed a chew of tobacco from Masters, are one and the same."

"Does that bring us any nearer to a solution of the present problem?" asked the commissioner.

"No. I wish you would send down-stairs for the man who was watching when that interview took place, however."

"He was sent for, and presently appeared.

"Do you happen to know a lawyer named Sol Solmenstein?" asked Nick, at once.

"Yes, sir. That is, I don't exactly know him; I have seen him once. He came here to see a Doctor Codman. I watched them while they were talking."

"Had you ever seen the man before, or have you seen him since that time?" asked Nick.

"No, sir."

"Did you hear anything that was said between the two men at the interview?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Did you watch them closely?"

"Never took my eyes off'n them an instant."

"Did you see anything pass between them?"

"Only a lead-pencil."

"How was that? Tell me exactly how it happened."

"The lawyer evidently was without a pencil, for he appeared to ask the doctor for one; anyhow, he took one from his vest-pocket and gave it to the lawyer. Then the lawyer made some notes with it on the back of an envelope. He had to sharpen it, too, before he did it. I remember that, because he took out his knife and crossed the room to where it was lighter while he sharpened it."

"I suppose his back was toward you while he was doing that, wasn't it?"

"I think it was—partly; yes, sir," replied the man, with some surprise in his voice; and then he hastened to add:

"But the two men were nowhere near together at the time."

"Certainly not. Did the lawyer return the pencil to the doctor when he was through with it?"

"He did."

"You see now how it was done, commissioner," said the detective, with a smile.

"What kind of a pencil was it?" asked the commissioner of the officer.

"A silver pencil. The kind that you screw on to make the lead come out."

"Then why did he have to sharpen it?"

"I don't know that. It didn't occur to me."

Nick laughed.

"Officer," he said, "he did not sharpen the pencil at all. He simply unscrewed the top so that he could drop a few pellets inside the tube; and those few pellets have been the means of permitting the prisoner to escape."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRISONER SETS A TRAP.

When Nick Carter reached his home after parting with the commissioner, he found that Doctor Stag was awaiting him, and that he was somewhat excited.

"Look here, Carter," he exclaimed, as soon as Nick entered the house, "what the devil has happened?"

"Suppose you tell me, doctor," replied the detective, with a smile. "Something seems to have happened to you."

"Something has."

"What is it?"

"This;" and the doctor extended his hand, which contained a letter.

"Read it," he said; and Nick slowly drew it from the envelope and did so.

If he experienced any surprise he did not show it; and, presently, he replaced it in the envelope and deposited it in his own pocket instead of returning it to the doctor.

"I will keep it if you don't mind," he said.

"Not at all. I am quite willing that you should keep it; but what does it mean?"

"Codman made his escape from the hospital last

night, Stag. He succeeded in fooling everybody, not excepting the great Doctor Stag; and the fact that he *did* fool *you* has made him so elated that he could not resist the impulse to write you a letter and tell you about it. I am glad, too, that he wrote it."

"Why? Because it makes an ass of me?"

"No; but because it proves that he is one himself. Having written one letter, he will presently write others. Letter-writing is the besetting weakness of educated criminals. They can no more resist the impulse to do it, once they are started on that road, than a pretty woman can resist the desire to glance into a mirror when she passes one. When did you receive it?"

"Half an hour ago."

"There is no stamp or postmark upon it. How did it get to you?"

"It was left at the door by a woman—at least, so my man said."

"By a woman, eh? I wonder if it was his sister who delivered it?"

"I don't know."

Nick produced the letter from his pocket again and read it aloud:

"Dear Doctor Stag," he read, "I am so grateful to you for not being any wiser than you are. I wonder where you earned all that reputation that is yours; and I wonder also if you have discovered yet how

thoroughly I fooled you. Acute Bright's, eh? That's funny! Let me take this opportunity of informing you that my condition, as you saw it, was brought about entirely by the use of a little pellet which I alone know how to manufacture, a few of which a friend of mine very cleverly concealed in the shank of a silver pencil I carry—and which, by the way, was thoroughly searched when I was first made a prisoner. I will add, also, for your further information, that the drug aforesaid does not impair the strength at all; the effect of it is only and solely in the appearance of the patient. It is possible that some day I may have an opportunity to give you a few lessons in the profession of which so many deluded persons believe you to be a master. CODMAN."

"Nice letter, isn't it?" said the doctor, gritting his teeth.

"Beautiful," replied Nick, smiling.

"I'd like to have him tied down upon a dissecting-table," muttered the physician.

"What! Alive?"

"Yes, alive."

"I am afraid, doctor, if such a thing should occur, you would do a worse thing than to cut him up while he was alive."

"What would that be, pray?"

"You would cut him loose. Your heart is much too tender to do anything else."

"Well, maybe it is. Anyhow, I thought you would

like to see that letter. I was just getting ready to go around to the hospital when it came."

"It is a pity that you did not conduct that examination last night, as you intended to do, doctor," said Nick.

"I couldn't, so there is no use in regretting it. Did he get clean away?"

"Yes."

"Then it's dollars to doughnuts that he'll make directly for that mechanical giant of his, isn't it?"

"I think so; but I have already sent my assistant to watch the woods where we think he concealed it"

"What are you going to do, Nick?"

"I? I am going to recapture Doctor Codman—and I think when I have accomplished it, that I will sit on him until he is tried and convicted."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, either. You will just about have to do something of that sort in order to hold him."

"It would appear so, doctor."

"You don't suppose that he would have gall enough to go again to his own office, like he did that other time, do you?" asked the doctor.

The detective bounded to his feet.

"By Jove, Stag!" he said; "that isn't at all a bad suggestion. I wish I had thought of it sooner. More than likely there are a lot of things there that he would like to have. Do you care to go up there with me?"

"You bet I do! I particularly want to see the inside of that office. I'll go."

"All right. Chick and the boys have got the automobile, but we will take the subway."

When they arrived at Stoneyhedge Court, Nick went at once to the superintendent of the building and inquired if Doctor Codman had been there.

"No, sir," replied the man. "The doctor has been arrested for something. He is in prison. I saw it in the papers, yesterday."

"But he has escaped," said Nick. "I did not know but that he might have been here."

"If he has been here, I don't know it."

"Do you lock the front door at night?"

"Yes, sir; at one o'clock. But Doctor Codman has a night-key. He could come in at any old time he wanted to."

"Have you such a thing as a pass-key to his office? But first, does he still retain the offices?"

"Yes, sir. His rent is paid a year in advance."

"And that negro who worked for him—is he here?"

"No, sir. He hasn't been here since—I think it was the day before yesterday."

"Very well. Now, have you a pass-key to the offices?"

"No, sir. Doctor Codman had a new Yale lock put on the door as soon as he took possession, and only he and the nigger had a key to it."

"Isn't there any way by which you can get into those rooms?"

"No, sir."

Nick crossed the entrance-hall to the door of the doctor's office—it was on the ground floor—and turned the knob.

To his astonishment the door opened at once, and the detective turned and motioned to Stag to follow him; but the superintendent interposed.

"I can't let you go in there," he said, "even if the doctor is under a cloud just now. It is his private office, and it is in my charge. It's all the same to me whether he is in prison or only out of town."

"But I am an officer," said Nick.

"That, sir, makes no difference to me, unless you have a search-warrant. If you've got that, well and good; if you haven't, you can't go inside."

The detective looked the superintendent in the eye for a moment, and, seeing that he was in earnest, he made as if to abandon the idea.

He seemed about to turn away, but in reality he moved only a step when his hand shot out, he seized the superintendent by the throat, and, before that individual was aware of what had happened, Nick had forced him through the doorway into the office, and seated him rather roughly in a convenient chair.

Nick clapped a pair of handcuffs upon him, and

with a second pair fastened him to the chair. Then he said:

"Now, my friend, I mean no harm. I am not going to steal anything, or get you into any trouble; but I *am* going to search these offices. As long as you sit there quietly, no harm will come to you, but if you attempt to call out, or to raise any disturbance, I'll either gag you or knock you on the head—whichever seems the handiest to do."

They left him in the outer office then and proceeded to the inner one; that which Codman had used as a private office. Beyond this, at one side, there was a bathroom; at the other side a sleeping-room.

The detective should have been warned by the ease with which he had gained access to the place, for, if he had but stopped to think of it, it was not at all like Codman to go away and neglect to spring the latch on his spring-lock so that the door would be fastened after him.

In fact, if Nick had stopped to reason the thing out at all, he would have thought it extremely unlikely that Codman would have entered his offices at all under the circumstances, and have left the door unlocked behind him.

But for once Nick neglected his usual caution. He was so intent upon making an examination of Codman's quarters, that he forgot all else for the nonce.

The private office was not unlike other private of-

fices of physicians, save that it was rather more plentifully supplied with apparatus of various kind, the uses of which Nick had not the slightest idea.

Neither, for that matter, had Doctor Stag; at least many of them; but he gazed at them with interest, nevertheless.

But Stag gave the mechanical contrivances only a cursory examination. There were other things there that interested him more. Along one side of the room was a row of shelves which looked as if it had been purloined from some drug-store, and upon the shelves was row after row of bottles; and what interested Doctor Stag the most was that every one of these bottles bore a label that had been filled out with a cabalistic sign of which he could make no meaning.

At last he resorted to the expedient of taking the bottles down one by one and smelling of the contents, after which he would either nod or shake his head in doubt, depending upon his recognition or non-recognition of the substance it contained.

During this proceeding Nick was at Codman's desk, searching among the papers for anything which might be of value to him; but all the time he also kept Doctor Stag in view, raising his eyes from his own occupation from time to time.

The doctor was still busily engaged with the drugs when Nick finished his task at the desk, having discovered nothing, and there being a large safe in one

corner of the room, the detective rose from the chair and crossed to it.

He stood looking at it for a moment, and then reached forward to turn the handle, to see if it were locked.

To his surprise, it was not fastened. The handle turned readily enough—and again he should have been warned, but he was not.

He had started to pull it open, and had moved it the fraction of an inch when he heard a cry of agony from Doctor Stag.

Nick started back and half-turned when he heard the cry, and he saw Stag collapse upon the floor; but he saw no more than that, for, in turning, he had pulled the safe door ajar, and the act was instantly followed by a loud explosion which hurled him across the room and brought the plastered ceiling tumbling on top of him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WORK OF A HUMAN FIEND.

The first effect of an explosion of any kind is always paralyzing, no matter what the consequences of it may have been; then the reaction comes, and everybody within hearing rushes to discover what has happened.

If, in the present instance, Doctor Stag had not called out, thus attracting the attention of the detective and causing him to turn before he had entirely opened the door of the safe, Nick Carter must inevitably have been killed.

As it was, that cry of agony had proceeded from Stag just in time to save Nick's life. For it was the opening of the door of the safe that had brought about the explosion, and, had the detective stood squarely in front of it and pulled it wide ajar with the sudden motion with which a man is apt to handle a heavy iron door, the slugs and bits of broken glass, and other missiles of which the infernal machine inside was composed, must have found his body and killed him.

But, as it was, he had not pulled the door open more than a foot.

It is true that that much had been sufficient to

operate the mechanism of the infernal machine, but the angle of the door itself acted as a shield for the detective, and the deadly missiles inside the safe, coming in contact with it, were turned aside and so thrown in a glancing direction against the walls of the room.

Not one of them touched Nick Carter, and, although he was hurled across the room by the force of the concussion, he was not injured at all; only dazed, and that only for a moment.

Nick recovered himself in a moment, and, leaping forward, he seized the doctor and carried him out to the hallway of the building, where he placed him on a convenient couch, while he returned for the superintendent of the building, who was still fastened to the chair in the outer office, and who had quietly fainted from sheer fright.

In the meantime, half a hundred persons had gathered around them, and among them a policeman who had heard the noise from the street, and who had hastened into the house to find out what was the matter.

To the officer Nick at once made himself known, directing him to keep the crowd back and to disperse it as quickly as he could; and then he gave his whole attention to Doctor Stag.

Stag was unconscious, but he was breathing, and so another doctor was sent for to look after him. He

came almost at once, for he lived next door, and, as soon as he arrived, the detective left Stag in his care and returned to the offices of Codman, having directed the policeman to permit nobody to follow him.

Of course, he understood now the significance of the unlocked office door and the unfastened safe. It was all a part of a clever trap which Codman had set for him—for Nick Carter.

He had remembered that on the occasion of his former escape from the officers of the law the detective had sought him at his office in Stoneyhedge Court, and, doubtless, he had believed that Nick would do it again. The manner in which Nick figured it out was this:

Codman, immediately after his escape from the hospital, had gone at once to the office to get such articles and drugs of which he stood in need, and, in leaving it, he had left the way wide open to the trap he had set while there.

He had had only to arrange his infernal machine, place it inside the safe, and connect it with the safe door in such a manner that the mere opening of the door would explode it; and, doubtless, he had argued that even if Nick Carter were not killed, he would receive a warning that he would not soon forget.

Concerning what had happened to Stag, Nick was in the dark, save only that the doctor had inhaled one of Codman's mysterious concoctions. But now, know-

ing that Stag was in good hands, he bent his attention to a further examination of the rooms.

There was, however, nothing to be found anywhere that was of the slightest value to him. He had abandoned the inner office, and returned to the outer one, when he discovered an iron box that stood upon the table in that room.

It was much the same sort of box that express messengers use on trains, only smaller, and Nick stepped forward and raised the lid.

There was a single article inside—an unsealed envelope, addressed to himself, which contained a folded sheet of paper. The detective smiled grimly when he discovered it.

"So," he said to himself, "I was not mistaken. Codman has caught the malady; he has begun to write letters. It will be interesting to see what this one contains."

Then he opened it and read:

"I have just a few words for you, Carter, if you should happen to live to read this; if not, others will find it, and it may serve as a warning to them, as it might—in the event of your death from the explosion which will follow when you open the safe—have done for you. I am tired of your persecutions. I am at the end of my patience. I am outlawed. I am hunted, and all because of your activity against me. This is a warning to you. Thus far I have not committed any very serious crime—at least, none that

you know about—and if you leave me alone I probably will not do any more than has already been done to turn the hand of the law against me; at least, I do not now think I will.

"But, if you continue to pursue me, I shall leave a trail behind me which you will find no difficulty in following, for it will be a trail of dead men and dead women.

"And you, Carter, unless you desist at once, I will kill. Not, perhaps, in the vulgar way—the way that is pursued by common murderers—but by methods of my own, and you have had already sufficient experience with me to conjecture what they may be.

"Therefore, be warned in time. Leave me severely alone and you will be safe; but attempt to pursue and recapture me, and not only your own life, but the lives of those you hold most dear shall be sacrificed one by one. CODMAN."

Nick put the letter in his pocket and stepped into the hall, where he found that Stag was now restored to consciousness, although he was still weak and very pale.

"What was it, doctor? What happened?" Nick asked him.

"It was one of those infernal bottles. I smelled of the contents—very carefully, too, or I would be a dead man by now—and it seemed to me that my head had been seized in a vise of red-hot iron. I knew no more until this minute. But I want that bottle, Nick. I want that bottle."

"I am afraid you won't get it, Stag," was the reply.

"Why not?"

"Haven't you been told about the explosion inside the office?"

"Yes."

"There is not an unbroken bottle left on those shelves, doctor."

"Is that so? Heavens! But if that particular bottle is broken how is it that you did not inhale some of the deadly stuff when you returned to the room?"

"I don't know; only that the windows and the doors are open. The fumes of it may have escaped."

Just at that moment a postman entered the building and gave a bundle of letters into the hand of the superintendent, who was standing near to him, and scowling. He ran through them rapidly, and presently opened one that was addressed to himself. This he read, and, having done so, he smiled, and then passed it to Nick Carter.

"Read it," he said. "It may interest you."

The detective took the letter and read:

"THOMAS MEAGER, SUPERINTENDENT STONEYHEDGE COURT: If Nick Carter has not already been to my office seeking me, I warn you not to enter my office, which is unlocked, nor to tamper with the safe inside, which is also not locked. There is an infernal machine inside that safe which will explode, and probably wreck the room as well as kill the man who at-

tempts to open the safe within forty-eight hours. After that it will be perfectly harmless.

"If Nick Carter has been there, when you receive this, you will doubtless be already informed concerning it.

"My rent is paid to a year from the first of May, last. I shall never use the offices again, nor anything that is in them. The contents I give to you, with the warning that you had best not monkey with the liquids in the bottles—if any are left. Out of the surplus rent the owners may pay for the damages. If there remains a balance, I give it to you, if you can get it from the owners. CODMAN."

"Stag," said the detective, as he gave the letter back to the man, "are you able to walk?"

"Sure, Nick."

"Then come along with me. There is nothing more to be done here. Officer, you can make your report of this affair to your captain, and tell him that I will also make a report of it at headquarters."

Doctor Stag seemed now to have entirely recovered, and the two were not long in seeking the subway and hurrying down-town.

"What are you going to do now, Nick?" asked the doctor, as they left the train.

"Nothing—just at present."

"Nothing?"

"I am going to sit in my study, close to the tele-

phone, and wait for a message from one of my assistants. That is about all I can do at present."

"I suppose so. Do you think that Codman will loom up in their vicinity?"

"I think it is the most likely place for him to appear, now."

"I'll tell you what I think about it."

"What, doctor?"

"I think that he will light out for some other part of the world. The pace is getting too hot for him here. He will seek fields and pastures new; eh?"

"I don't agree with you."

"No? Why not?"

"It is not his characteristic. He will stay here and fight."

"But why? What would be his object?"

"The man's insensate pride will not let him run away, in the first place; in the second, his conceit is so great that, believing he can get the best of me, he will remain in this neighborhood to do it."

The doctor shook his head.

"Besides," continued the detective, "Codman now has a serious grievance against me. The events of the last few days have made him hate me. I have penetrated his secret—the secret of the mechanical giant; he will not forgive that."

"Then there is no question about the fact that you

are in great danger. I will confess to you that I wouldn't care to have Codman looking for my scalp."

"Well, he hasn't got mine yet; and I do not think he will get it; but, as the case stands just at present, there are four men whom he desires out of the way."

"Four?"

"Yes. Chick, Ten-Ichi, Patsy, and myself."

Having reached Nick Carter's door, the detective invited Doctor Stag to enter. Joseph was awaiting him in the front hall, and Nick knew instantly, from the expression of his face, that something had happened.

"What is it, Joseph?" he demanded quickly.

"A telephone message, sir, from the little hotel in Morgantown," was the reply. "The proprietor has telephoned to me, not fifteen minutes ago, that Patsy is at his place, badly wounded, and that Chick and Ten-Ichi have disappeared. He says that Patsy thinks they are dead—that Doctor Codman has killed them."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEAD MAN IN THE DOORWAY.

When the detective arrived at the small country hotel in Morgantown, which was the nearest place of the kind to that forest into which he had sent his assistants to watch for Codman, Doctor Stag was with him, for he had insisted that the great physician should go there to attend to the wounded Patsy.

They found the lad in a serious condition, indeed. He had been shot in his left shoulder and had fallen unconscious. Afterward, when consciousness returned to him, he had managed to make his way unaided to the hotel, but the pain of his wound and the great loss of blood that he had sustained had told severely upon him, so that he was now in a high state of fever.

The doctor simply would not permit Nick to attempt to talk to him, but peremptorily ordered him away.

"I cannot let you say a word to Patsy before tomorrow morning," he told Nick. "I must at once get that bullet out of him, and then we will see—what we will see. You must do the best you can for the present without any aid whatever from him."

Nick descended the stairs and found the proprietor.

"Mr. Shaw," he said, "I wish you would tell me all you know about this affair."

"That will be mighty little, Mr. Carter."

"It is now five o'clock," said Nick. "About how long ago was it when Patsy returned here wounded?"

"It was about one o'clock, I think."

"He came, of course, from that direction," and Nick pointed down the road.

"Yes."

"When did you first see him?"

"When he was about thirty rods down the road. I saw at once that something was the matter, and I ran to him and helped him to the house. He fainted away almost as soon as I got him inside; but I gave him brandy and brought him around."

"Now tell me exactly what he said, when he recovered consciousness."

"He asked me to telephone to you at once and tell you that he was here, and wounded, and that he feared that Codman had captured or killed Chick and Ten-Ichi."

"Is that the way he put it? Captured or killed?"

"Yes; although later he expressed the belief that they were dead."

"Was he entirely in his right mind when he said that, or was he wandering a little?"

"I could not say as to that, sir."

"Did he tell you how he happened to have been shot?"

"I asked him who shot him, and he said Codman.

Isn't he the man you were after when you were here before, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"And has he escaped again?"

"Yes."

"And, of course, you have reason to think that he is hiding in the forest around here?"

"Yes. It strikes me, Shaw, that you are doing the questioning, instead of I."

"I have a reason for it, Mr. Carter."

"Good! What is it?"

"I have lived in this house all my life. My father and grandfather lived here before me and ran this hotel. It has been in the family a hundred and forty years."

"Well, what has that to do with the case in hand?"

"Merely this, sir: That I know every inch of the ground for twenty miles around here, and I might almost say that I know every tree by sight. If you wish me to help you find this man you are after, I will be glad to do so."

The detective thrust out his hand and grasped the landlord's.

"Thank you," he said. "You will be invaluable to me. I accept your offer gladly. Now let us get back to Patsy again."

"Yes."

"Did you get any furtner information out of him?"

"Only in disjointed sentences; but the consensus of it all was that, while they were searching the woods, they separated. After some time Patsy heard several pistol-shots. He ran in the direction from which they proceeded, and presently stepped out into a small clearing, or opening, in the woods.

"At the opposite side of the clearing he saw both of his companions lying upon the ground apparently dead, or unconscious, and he started forward toward them.

"Just as he did so, there was another pistol-shot, and he felt the impact of the bullet in his own body. When he was conscious again, he crawled to the spot where he had seen his companions lying on the ground, only to find that their bodies were not there.

"After that he managed somehow to find his way here, and that is all that I could get out of him. I doubt if he really knows any more than that about it."

"Where is the automobile?" asked Nick.

"I don't know anything about that, save that it passed here this morning with your three assistants inside."

"Have you a saddle-horse, Mr. Shaw?"

"Two of them."

"Good! Will you go with me?"

"Where to?"

"To look for the automobile, and to find out anything else we can."

"Yes. We haven't much time before dark, however."

"We will make use of such time as we have, then. How soon will you be ready?"

"In ten minutes."

"I will meet you at the front door. In the meantime, I will see how the doctor is getting along with Patsy."

But Doctor Stag scowled at him and sent him away with a gesture, so he returned to the front of the hotel and waited for the horses.

Shaw carried a Winchester rifle across his saddle, and Nick nodded approval when he saw it.

"It might come in handy," said Shaw, noticing the gesture; "and I know how to use it, if it should."

They discovered the automobile after riding a considerable distance. It had been turned into the narrow and rough roadway which led directly into the forest to the left.

Just now the machine was only a few rods off the main highway, and it was in perfect order—no doubt it was just as the three assistants had left it when they arrived on the scene that morning.

"How much daylight have we left to us, Shaw?" asked the detective.

"Rather more than an hour," was the reply.

"Good! I have a fancy to go on to the ravine

where Codman has a cabin. It is about a mile into these woods. Will you go with me?"

"Sure. Where is the cabin? In the Devil's Ravine?"

"Yes. I thought you knew——"

"It is a year since I have been about this place, sir."

"All right. Come on. By the way, that is an appropriate name you have for the ravine."

"Yes. Devil's Gulch was the old name for it. Three-fourths of the people who live around here will tell you that it is haunted."

"And they wouldn't be far astray at that," commented Nick. "It is haunted, at the present time, and by a veritable devil, too, although he is a human being. I refer to Codman."

"Yes. I understand."

"He is a fiend if ever there was one."

"You say he has a cabin in the ravine?"

"Yes; it was there where I first saw that mechanical giant of his."

"That what?"

"I had forgotten that we did not tell you about it. He has manufactured a gigantic representation of a man. It is eight feet tall, and is perfectly proportioned. It is operated by a mechanism inside that I know nothing about. All that I do know is, that he gets inside of the thing and makes it do things just as a man would do them."

They had been riding on along the road through the woods while they were conversing, and, a few moments later, they came out upon the ledge of rock over the ravine where the cabin was located.

"The cabin is down there," said Nick, pointing into the depths below them. "Will you go down with me, or will you remain here and watch the horses?"

"I'll go along with you, if you don't mind. The horses can take care of themselves."

"All right," replied Nick. "Come ahead."

They dismounted, fastened the horses to trees, and then Nick led the way down the narrow and precipitous path which led to the bottom.

A short distance along the rocky floor of the ravine brought them to the cabin; and, as the detective stepped out in front of it, he started back quickly and seized Shaw by the arm to enjoin silence.

The door of the cabin stood wide ajar, and, seated directly in the opening, was a huge negro who seemed to be staring with wide-open eyes, directly toward them.

But it was only for a moment that Nick hesitated.

"Do you see what it is, Shaw?" he asked of his companion.

"Yes; a nigger."

"True," said Nick; "but he is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes! come on."

It was the same negro who had served Codman so faithfully at his office in the city, and he was stone-dead.

The cause of death was not apparent, for there was no wound upon him anywhere; but there could be no doubt that he had been made a victim of one of Codman's poisons, and that he had been dead some hours.

As the detective approached, he discovered that the dead negro held something in his right hand. It proved to be a slip of paper, and, as Nick immediately surmised, it was another message intended for him. Opening it, he read:

"This is the last warning, Carter. I know that you will come here. Take my advice and turn back while yet there is time. I might have left this message in the hand of one of your assistants, but it was too much trouble to bring the body here. The nigger will do. His usefulness is past. He did not know, when he was falling asleep, that it was the long sleep. He has died painlessly.

"But such will not be your fate when I get you in my power, if you do not turn back now. I will give you all the agony I can—and I will have great sport with you if I follow my inclinations. So, be warned in time. CODMAN."

"What do you think of that, Shaw?" asked Nick, giving him the note.

"I think," replied the landlord slowly, but emphatic-

ally, "that if I were you I would hunt that man down, if it took all the years of my life to do it."

Nick was still standing with his eyes fixed upon the note, which Shaw had returned to him, and now he said:

"Did you notice what he has written here in regard to my two assistants who are missing? Did you notice that?"

"Certainly."

"What do you make out of it?"

"Simply that he is bluffing."

"Do you really think that?"

"Yes; and I'll tell you why."

"Do so, please."

"I don't know anything about that man except what you have told me, and what I have guessed, but it is my opinion that if either of your assistants was dead at the time he wrote the note, nothing would have been too much trouble for him in the way of bringing the bodies here so that you would find one or both of them, as we have found the nigger."

"There is logic in that, certainly."

"Depend upon it, they are alive, as yet, at least."

"I think so, too. I want to think so."

"Look here, Mr. Carter, do you know what I think?"

"Tell me what it is."

"I think that the man, Codman, is mad—crazy."

"There is no doubt of that in my mind."

"Well, the very fact that he has *not* left the dead body of one of your assistants here to deliver this note suggests something to me."

"What is it?"

"It suggests that he is saving them alive until such time as he can capture you also, and that then he intends to make you all suffer together. That would be a madman's scheme, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"The only thing about the whole affair that puzzles me is that he permitted Patsy to escape."

"I have thought about that, too," said Nick, "and I think I can explain it."

"How?"

"Codman could not very well carry more than one man's body at a time, could he?"

"No."

"Then we will suppose that Chick and Ten-Ichi were lying on the ground, as Patsy believes he saw them, wounded or dead."

"Yes."

"If they had been dead, or even mortally wounded, Codman would have left them there; he would not have taken the trouble to remove them."

"I agree with you."

"Being slightly wounded by bullets, or having succumbed to the effects of some poison of his that he

has succeeded in throwing over them—which I think is likely—and he being a doctor, he has carried them away, one by one, to doctor them back to life in order that he may later torture them at his leisure, or, what is more likely, use them in one or more of his infernal experiments."

"By Jove, Mr. Carter, I think you have struck it!"

"Doubtless he had to carry them some distance. He took one and then the other; and it was while he had gone with the second one that Patsy revived and made his escape. Don't you see?"

"Yes."

"Otherwise Patsy would at this moment have been a prisoner, also."

"Exactly."

"Now, Shaw, let us change the subject for a moment."

"All right."

"What do you know about this ravine? How many secrets has it?"

"Secrets?"

"I mean hiding-places; caves; localities where a man like Codman would not fear pursuit."

"Oh! It is full of them. I used to know every inch of it as a youngster. I haven't been here in years, but I think I can find every one of them, for all that."

"Had the horses had their supper before we started?"

"Yes; they had just been fed and watered."

"Are you game to stay here with me through the night?"

"You bet your life I am; only we haven't got any light."

"Yes, we have. I have got an electric light in my pocket, and, unless Codman has removed it since I was here before, there is another one in this cabin."

"What do you expect to accomplish by remaining here through the night, Mr. Carter?"

"I don't know. I've got a hunch to remain; that's all."

"Then we'll stay."

"Good! Here is that other light. You work it by pressing this button when you want the light and by releasing it when you don't want it. See?"

"Perfectly. Yes."

"Do you think that we left the horses all right for the night?"

"No. I'll go up and lead them back a little way into the woods, and also take off the saddles. I won't be long."

Left alone, Nick seated himself on a fallen tree behind the cabin, where he could not see the staring eyes of the dead negro, and waited for Shaw's return; but he had not long to wait, for almost immediately Shaw was back again, wearing an exceedingly perplexed countenance.

"What is the matter?" asked Nick.

"The horses aren't there," was the reply; and Shaw seated himself on the log beside the detective.

"Not there?" repeated Nick. "Where are they?"

"Gone. Vamosed. Escaped. Disappeared. Vanished."

"Did they break loose?" asked the detective.

"Not by a jugful; they were untied."

"You did not attempt to search for them?"

"No; what's the use? It is almost dark now. We have decided to remain here for the night, and so we won't need them till morning; and, besides, it's ten to one that I couldn't have found them, anyhow."

"That's true enough." Nick fell to thinking, and then he added: "Codman is making his presence felt."

"That's what he is," replied Shaw.

"The fact that he knows we are here puts a different light upon our remaining, doesn't it?"

"Decidedly."

"I was hoping that he would be asleep somewhere, as soon as it got late enough, and that we would have the whole night to search around here without the fear of his interfering."

"Well, he knows that we are here, all right."

"Yes; and that is why I said that it put a different light on affairs."

"Yes."

"Instead of searching, we must let him do the searching."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we must manage to fool him."

"That isn't bad; but how?"

"Come and help me carry the body of that negro out of the house, and I'll show you."

"Where are you going to put it?"

"Anywhere out of our sight. We will bring that bench out of the house, and put it here. We will put the body on the bench and cover it with the canvas sheet he used to throw over the giant when it wasn't in use."

"And then——"

"Then we will make ourselves comfortable inside the cabin—or appear to do so."

"I am afraid I don't understand, Mr. Carter."

"I'll show you; come ahead."

The bench was brought out and set down behind the cabin. Then the body of the dead negro was placed upon it and covered with the canvas sheet, which they fastened down securely over it, after which they returned to the interior of the cabin.

Darkness had fallen by the time this was accomplished, and Nick at once closed and securely fastened the door and the shutters of board over the only two windows with which the cabin was provided.

"We'll smother in here," said Shaw.

"We won't be here long enough to smother," replied the detective. "I noticed, when I was here before, that Codman had provided himself with quite a wardrobe."

"Clothes, you mean?"

"Yes; they hang behind that sheet over there."

"What——"

"Watch me."

Nick crossed to the sheet in question, which had been tacked to a frame at the top, so it formed a sort of closet for the reception of clothing, and, pulling it aside, disclosed several suits of clothes.

Two of these he took down from their hooks, after which he returned for the other and began, with these last, to stuff one pair of trousers, at the same time directing Shaw to do the same with a second pair. Shaw was beginning to understand now, and he lost no time in complying.

There were two bunks in the cabin, one above the other, and when Nick had completed the stuffing of one of the suits he carried it to one of the bunks and placed it under the blankets.

He took great care in arranging it so that it would appear as if a man were lying asleep under the blanket of the bunk; and then, with an old jacket, he manufactured a fair representation of a man's head, lying with the face to the wall.

"There," he said, studying what he had accom-

plished. "That will do very well if a light is not thrown directly upon it. Now for yours, Shaw."

"Mine is ready. I see what you are up to now."

"All right."

Nick took the second stuffed figure and arranged it in the remaining bunk as he had done with the first, and when he had finished the task he stepped back again and regarded them both with a smile on his face.

"I'm hungry, aren't you?" he asked Shaw, then.

"Yes; and there seems to be plenty of food here, too."

"Exactly," replied Nick. "We will cook some of it, too; but we won't eat it."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because if we should do so we would doubtless fall asleep in earnest. Don't you understand? The doctor has left it here purposely, and he has drugged it. If he is watching and waiting anywhere around, he will smell the cooking and will think we have eaten. Then, after a while, when all is quiet, he will think that his drugs have taken effect, and he will make no bones about breaking into the cabin."

"By Jove, Carter! And we——"

"We will be outside, waiting for him to do it; and if all works well, instead of his capturing us, we will capture him. Do you understand now?"

"You bet!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ESCAPE FROM AN AWFUL FATE.

Together they went through the ceremony of frying bacon and other things, not one of which they dared to eat. There was no doubt whatever in the mind of the detective, since the disappearance of the horses rendered it certain that Codman knew of their presence there, that he had "doctored" every morsel of food that was contained in that cabin, and he was positive that if they should dare to partake of any of it they would be poisoned, or, at least, rendered unconscious, and, therefore, an easy prey for the madman.

And so the food, when cooked, was thrown into the fire, and at last they extinguished the two lamps they had lighted, and prepared to make their escape from the cabin.

"How shall we get outside?" asked Shaw. "Codman is probably on the watch."

"It may be that he is—but, even so, I don't believe that he has stationed himself quite near enough to the cabin to see us when we got out. Will you follow my directions exactly as I give them?"

"Certainly."

"Then lie flat on your belly, close to the casing of

the door. I will open it just wide enough for you to crawl out. Keep as flat down as possible and crawl directly forward."

"All right."

"You remember those alders, half a dozen rods directly in front of the cabin?"

"Yes."

"Go there, and wait for me."

"And you? How will you get out and close the door after you without standing up?"

"That is dead easy," replied Nick.

"I don't see how."

"I have found a small gimlet here in the cabin. While you are crawling toward the alders I will bore the gimlet into the door near the bottom far enough so that when I am ready I can pull the door shut and latch it. Then I will remove the gimlet and follow you. Are you ready now?"

"Yes."

"Then go ahead."

Nick opened the door wide enough for Shaw to pass through, and the moment that his companion was clear of the opening he followed him, after quickly making use of the gimlet as he had explained.

Shaw had not covered half the distance to the alders before Nick was following him, and as Nick made better speed than the landlord they arrived at their place of concealment at the same time.

"Gee!" whispered Shaw in the detective's ear, "this is better than staying in that stuffy room with the smell of that bacon in your nose."

"Yes," admitted Nick. "Be silent now."

They were soon to discover that it was well for them that they had not elected to remain inside the cabin while awaiting the arrival of Codman.

Something like half an hour had passed when Nick suddenly gripped his companion's arm.

"He comes," he whispered.

They could see a shadow, blacker than those by which it was surrounded, glide slowly toward the cabin from the direction of the path down the cliff, and it kept steadily moving forward until it came to a stop directly in front of the door, and there its owner seemed to be engaged in performing some noiseless work.

"What in blazes is he up to?" whispered Shaw in Nick's ear.

"Shhh!" admonished the detective. "I don't know."

"Why not make a rush for him now, Carter?" Shaw whispered again.

"No; wait until he enters the house. He would escape us now in the darkness."

"What is he doing?"

"I don't know, I tell you. Reconnoitering, probably."

"He is going a mighty funny way about it, then."

Nick thought so, too, although he did not admit it.

Codman—if it were he—was almost motionless in front of the door, and stood with his back toward them. At the same time, however, he seemed to be engaged in some sort of occupation the significance of which neither of the men could fathom.

They watched him breathlessly for almost a quarter of an hour, when suddenly he left the door and moved to the nearest window.

Here again he occupied himself as he had done at the door, although he was not so long a time about it; and then he moved on to the second and the only remaining window.

Presently he completed his task at the second window, whatever it might have been, and then he turned and glided away in the darkness.

He was gone only a moment when he returned, and, going forward as far as the door, he seemed to halt there for a moment, when he again turned away. But it was only to return a second time, and this time he went as far as one of the windows, paused a moment, and then again disappeared.

But he reappeared a third time and went to the remaining window. This time he barely stopped at all, but passed on around the cabin to the rear.

"What *is* he up to?" demanded Shaw in a whisper.

"I don't know yet; but I'm guessing," replied Nick.

"Guess for me, won't you?"

"Wait a moment, and if I am right you will see for yourself presently. It is a fortunate thing for us that we did not remain inside that cabin, however."

"Why?"

"Wait and you will see. Hush! There he is again."

It was true. The shadow appeared around the corner of the building again, and this time Codman went directly to the door, halted there, struck a match and applied the flame to a bundle which was against the door, and which he had deposited there while it was too dark for the watchers to see what he was doing.

It was evident, too, that the contents of the bundle had been soaked with oil, for it blazed up instantly and fiercely; and the instant it did so the incendary leaped from the door to the first window and again applied a lighted match to a bundle of something that he had already put there.

"He has fired the house!" whispered Shaw.

"Yes," said Nick.

"And he believes that we are asleep inside."

"Yes," said Nick again.

Codman was now passing to the second window and could be plainly seen in the light of the two fires he had kindled.

Shaw raised his rifle, and in another second Cod-

man's career would have been forever ended had not the detective reached up and stopped him just as he was about to shoot.

"Let me kill the scoundrel!" whispered Shaw angrily.

"No," replied Nick. "No."

"Why not? Why not? He deserves it."

"Yes; I know; but there are three reasons why it would not be best."

At that instant Codman disappeared again around the corner of the cabin, and Shaw muttered half-aloud:

"Damn your reasons!"

"Don't forget," said Nick quietly, "that he has my two assistants imprisoned somewhere, and that we don't know where. If we killed him now, we might never find them, and if they are wounded and helpless, they might starve to death. Isn't that reason enough, Shaw?"

"Yes. I didn't think of that. Forgive me."

"The second reason is that when that cabin has burned to the ground he will think that I have perished with it. He will, therefore, be just that much easier to capture."

"I had not thought of that, either."

"And the third reason is that I particularly wish now, since he has killed that poor negro, to take him

alive. You see, I have his confession to that crime in my pocket."

"Right."

"We will have to move back a bit farther among these alders," said Nick. "There is too much light where we are."

"Say, Carter," said Shaw, when they had gained a place of more security, "do you know what that villain has done?"

"Yes; he has set fire to the cabin."

"I should say he had. Why, he has set a dozen fires. He has got them all around the cabin—in front, at the back, and at both ends. Do you realize that?"

"Yes."

"And do you see now what he was doing to the door and to those windows when he puzzled us so?"

"Certainly. He was screwing them fast to the building, so that even if we should awaken, inside, we could not by any possibility get out."

"Did you ever hear of such a fiend as that?"

"Oh, yes. I have known others that were quite as bad as he is."

Suddenly they discontinued their conversation, for at that moment the tall figure of Codman appeared in view again, and he came directly toward them until he was half-way between them and the burning cabin.

There he paused, and he stood for a long time with

arms folded across his breast, as motionless as a statue, silently regarding the blaze he had kindled.

The entire structure was now enveloped in a mass of flame, and if there had been human beings inside, as Codman supposed there were, they could have had no hope of escape now.

Suddenly Codman moved a little. He raised his right arm, and, in a voice which reached the two watchers, he exclaimed:

"So will perish all who dare oppose me!"

He remained where he was until the roof had fallen in and the door had collapsed; then he passed around the building again, this time on a run, and after a moment he returned, bearing the body of the dead negro in his arms.

Suddenly he made a rush toward the blazing furnace of fire, and, raising the dead body, he cast it from him, with a strength which even Nick Carter did not believe he possessed, straight through the fallen door into the vortex of flame.

Then, with a harsh laugh, he turned away, and before either of the watchers realized it he had disappeared from view. Nor did he reappear, although Nick and Shaw waited until the fire had died down to a mass of glowing coals.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BANDIT CHIEFTAIN.

It was long after midnight when Nick and his companion finally abandoned their vigil, being satisfied that Codman would appear no more that night.

"Shaw," said Nick, then, "you say that you know every inch of this territory; eh?"

"I do; pretty near it."

"Do you happen to know a short cut from here to your hotel which we could take without going upon the highway at all?"

"I do that. It will take us right behind my barn."

"And about how far is it?"

"Three good miles, I should say."

"How long will it take us to cover it—in the dark?"

"Maybe an hour."

"I want you to stick to me now, Shaw, and see this thing out."

"That's what I intend to do."

"I want your knowledge of this locality."

"I know that."

"And we must not forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"We must not forget that Codman believes that we are dead. Shaw, we must remain dead, for a time."

"Yes; I am onto that. But——"

"Go on. But what?"

"Suppose he should go nosing around there in search of our bodies and not find them? He would be wise, wouldn't he?"

"I don't think it will occur to him to do that. But, anyhow, I propose to capture him before those ruins cool off enough for him to search for our remains."

"Bully."

"And now, Shaw, it is up to you to lead the way to your hotel just as quickly as possible."

"What for?"

"I must find out how Patsy is getting along, for one thing. For another, we must set the minds of Stag and Patsy, as well as those of your own people, at rest concerning us; and, again, I am going to disguise you and myself."

"Come on, then, if you are ready."

"Quite ready."

It was a quarter to two when they arrived at the hotel and let themselves in by the back way; and it was a quarter-past three when they left it again by the same route and glided away through the darkness.

They had found that Patsy was very much better; they had offset any anxiety that might otherwise have been felt by their non-reappearance; they had arranged that the automobile should be sent for and the horses searched for, and they had provided themselves with

a goodly supply of food—enough to last them a couple of days.

And last, but not least, they were so thoroughly disguised that it would have been impossible for any person who knew them to recognize either of them.

Nick had stained Shaw's skin and his own to the hue of an Italian laborer, and with jet-black wigs and with clothing such as is usually worn by the laborers of that class they were perfect representations of what they pretended to be.

And much to the detective's surprise and gratification he discovered that Shaw spoke Italian quite well, so as they trudged along the path through the woods toward the ravine they talked together in that tongue.

It was daylight when they arrived again at the ravine where the cabin had been burned, and, following the plan they had agreed upon, they selected a place somewhere in front of the ruins, started a small fire, and began imperturbably to prepare their breakfast.

It was Nick Carter's idea that some time during the day—the forenoon, doubtless—Codman would reappear there, and he wished the wily doctor to discover the two Italians—himself and Shaw—evidently camping out.

For the rest—for what was to happen after that, Nick had determined to let events shape themselves.

One word of caution he gave to Shaw.

"It is more than likely that Codman speaks Italian," he said to him, "and if he does he may discover that yours is not perfect. For that reason you had better pretend to have a serious impediment in your speech. Stutter like sixty, and when you are at loss for a word stop and look appealingly at me. I will appear to help you out. That will fool him nicely."

Luck played into their hands even sooner than Nick had expected, for they had not half-finished their meal when the detective raised his eyes to discover that Codman was standing directly in front of them, not fifty feet away, and was regarding them silently.

He had approached without a sound, and he stood with folded arms and with an evil smile upon his sinister, satanic face.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "and what do you want here?"

Nick leaped to his feet, bowed low, smiled his broadest and most Italian smile, and, paying no attention to the questions that had been asked him, asked in Italian if the stranger would honor them by having something to eat.

The stranger would not, and he said so in Italian as perfect as Nick spoke it himself. But he drew nearer and seated himself upon a rock that was handy by.

"Who are you two?" he asked again, this time in Italian.

"This," replied Nick, jerking his thumb toward Shaw, "is my cousin, Luigi Caligula; and I am Pietro Lacava; both at your service, signor."

"What are you doing here?" was the next question; and Nick threw out his hands with an expressive shrug of his shoulders as he replied:

"As you see, signor, we are eating our breakfast."

The doctor frowned.

"What brought you here?" he demanded.

"We came. We walked. We were not brought," replied Nick, again smiling.

"But the main road is almost two miles from here. How did you happen to wander into this place?"

"The main road, signor," replied Nick, "is not healthy for my cousin and me in the daylight, and, therefore, we were traversing it in the night. It has been our habit, for the preservation of our good health, to travel by night only. In the night, as we were passing along the road, we saw the light of a fire in the woods. We turned in to find the cause, and behold! we are here."

"What time did you arrive here?"

"In the night. We do not know the time."

"Did you see anybody here, near the burning building?"

"No, signor. It was only a heap of ashes when we arrived."

"You are fleeing from justice, I suppose. Why?"

Again Nick shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"There was a misunderstanding," he explained. "Two of my countrymen were unfortunately killed. Luigi and I were afraid that it might be thought that we killed them."

"I see. Doubtless you *did* kill them; eh?"

Nick only smiled; a smile that meant nothing.

"What is the matter with your cousin that he says nothing? Is he dumb?"

"He has an impediment. He stutters. Luigi, speak to the signor."

Thus abjured, Shaw, after several frightful grimaces, managed to articulate a few words of greeting, after which he subsided into silence again; but Codman seemed satisfied.

"Where were you going?" he asked of Nick again.

"To Boston, where we have acquaintances."

"Have you been followed, do you think?"

"No, signor. That was impossible."

"Do either of you speak any English at all?"

"No, signor. We arrived together, only two weeks ago, in this country."

"It didn't take you long to get into trouble, did it?"

"No, signor."

Codman was silent for a while; and then he said suddenly:

"How would you like to remain in hiding in these woods for a time?"

"It seems like an excellent place in which to hide," replied Nick.

"I can give you employment if you care to stay."

Nick smiled and shrugged again.

"How do we know that the signor would not betray us?" he demanded, with a glint in his eyes which he knew would please Codman better than anything he could say.

It was Codman's turn to shrug and smile; and he replied:

"I am a fugitive, like yourself. I wish to gather around me a band of faithful men. I was thinking about it when I suddenly discovered you seated here. Since I have found you, I have decided it would be well if I should have only Italians around me."

"Banditti?" inquired Nick softly.

Codman nodded.

"*Si, signor.* It would suit both Luigi and me. We are not without experience, although it is perhaps unfortunate that neither of us speak English."

"Not at all. It is rather an advantage."

"So? Have you others with you now?"

"No. I am alone."

"And what is there for banditti to prey upon here? Could we take rich signors for ransom, think you?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"And are there not soldiers to chase us?"

"Bah! No one could ever find us where I hide."

"And one more word, signor."

"Yes?"

"You would be chief; no?"

"Yes."

"What proportion of the gain would be ours?"

"You will divide sixty per cent. between you. I will take the remaining forty."

"That would be well; but when there are others in the band?"

"When there are others a new arrangement will be made."

"And your name, signor? We have told you ours."

"I shall be known only as Captain Satan."

"Ah! Ah! It is a good name. I admire it."

"Is it a bargain, then, Pietro?"

"It is a bargain."

"Then follow me and I will give you something better to eat than that trash you have before you."

"It is well, signor."

"Wait. Luigi has not spoken. What says he?"

"He says as I say, signor."

"All the same, I would rather hear him say it for himself."

"Speak, Luigi," ordered Nick fiercely.

Again a succession of frightful grimaces, and at last the words were out.

"Come," said Codman, then.

They rose and followed him through the woods, straight up the ravine.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO HOURS MORE TO LIVE.

The detective had not even imagined any such success as this when he decided to return to the ravine disguised as an Italian laborer.

In fact, he had had no definite plan in view, other than that the disguise would enable him to get upon the track of Codman more easily, and that possibly it might secure him an interview with the man.

However, things had turned out much better than he had dared to anticipate, and now here he was, openly following the poisoner and would-be bandit up the glen toward his place of retreat, which Nick began to suspect was so surely hidden away that even Shaw would not have known where to find it with all his boasted knowledge of "every inch" of the territory in that vicinity.

The detective wondered if they would be expected to dive through the pool. He hoped not, for such a course would be fatal to the disguises that he and Shaw were wearing.

Not that the stain he had used would wash off; it would not. But the stain did not cover their bodies, and the wigs they wore would certainly be disarranged by immersion in the water.

However, no word was spoken between them as they made their way up the glen, with Codman leading the way, with Nick close behind him, and Shaw bringing up the rear.

It would have been an easy matter then for Nick to have leaped upon Codman's back and so have overcome and captured him; but this he did not do, because he felt it necessary that the doctor should remain at liberty at least until he had led them to the place where he had taken Chick and Ten-Ichi.

Codman kept on straight ahead of them until they came to the falls, and at once Nick's mind was set at rest concerning the pool, for hanging over the brow of the cliff, directly beside the rushing water, was a ladder of rope; and without even so much as looking around at his companions the poisoner began to climb it.

Nick waited until he had arrived at the top, and then he calmly followed, after which he stood waiting until Shaw had joined them.

The detective thought when he climbed over the brow of the cliff and stood upon solid ground—or, rather, solid rock—again that there was a peculiar smile upon the sinister countenance of Doctor Codman, and for one fleeting instant the thought occurred to him that possibly the man had penetrated their disguises and was merely leading them into a trap.

But he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it

occurred to him, and as soon as Shaw joined them the journey was taken up again as methodically as before.

They were now in even a wilder part of the glen, although the cliffs were by no means so high.

After traveling some distance farther, Codman turned into a connecting ravine, through which a small stream flowed into the larger one they had been following, and here, presently, a pathway led them to the top of the cliff, thence over a short distance of comparatively level space, and thence down again into a sort of cup which Nature had somehow ground out of the massive hills.

The detective could not do otherwise than admire the wild beauty of the place. Towering and beetling cliffs frowned down upon them from every side, and there seemed to be no means of entrance to, or egress from, the place save by the way they had come; and when Nick glanced toward Shaw he saw at once that the spot was a strange one to him also.

In the very center of this remarkable place, which could not have exceeded fifty feet in diameter, Codman halted. Then he turned and faced them.

"I am about to reveal a secret to you," he said in his perfect Italian. "The secret of our hiding-place."

"*Si, signor,*" replied Nick, answering for both.

"I will not ask you to swear never to reveal it, for it will be to your own interests not to do so; but I

will say this: If ever I find that either of you have so much as a thought of betraying me or my secrets, my arm is long and my vengeance is sure."

"Si, signor," said Nick again.

A heavy mass of trailing vines hung down over the cliff to the floor of the basin, and now, after uttering the laconic word, "Come!" Codman stepped forward, brushed a mass of the vines aside and passed beyond them.

Instantly Nick followed, as also did Shaw, and as instantly they found themselves at the entrance to a huge cavern, which seemed to extend backward into the hills to unknown depths.

The way before them was broad and high—possibly ten feet in diameter either way, and, after taking a lantern from the wall and lighting it, Codman again led the way forward.

Nick counted the steps he took as they advanced, for they proceeded in perfect silence. And he counted three hundred, which brought him to the supposition that they had penetrated the mountain to a depth of seven or eight hundred feet before they came to a stop at all.

And here they found themselves in a large chamber, where stalactite and stalagmite gave back irridescent and ghostlike reflection from the light that Codman carried.

There was some rough furniture in the place. There

was a rustic table in the center; some blankets were piled in a corner, and there were other necessities scattered about which led the detective to believe that this was what might be termed the living-room of the cavern.

"We have arrived," said Codman; and he proceeded at once to light two lamps that were provided with reflectors. And then, while Nick and Shaw imperturbably produced pipes from their blouses and filled them, he stood silently regarding his two recruits.

"This is our cavern home," he said. "There are many more chambers like this one, and also there are several other entrances besides the one by which we came here."

"That is good, signor," replied Nick, for he saw that he was expected to say something. "I am accustomed to caverns. I have lived in them before."

"After a little while," said Codman, "I will show you more of the cavern. I will conduct you to the other entrances—but just now I have something else to do."

He left them then, without another word, going swiftly away through the darkness without a light, and leaving them in the broad glare of the two lamps he had lighted.

The instant he disappeared Nick wheeled and approached Shaw swiftly.

"Listen," he whispered rapidly. "He will return in

one minute to watch us. Do not speak at all save in reply to anything I might say, and then take your cue from me—and don't forget to stutter in Italian."

He passed rapidly on then and began to study the walls of the cavern; and presently, believing that Codman was probably on the watch by that time, he turned and said aloud in Italian to Shaw:

"We have met with great good fortune, Luigi, my cousin."

"Yes," replied Shaw, stuttering frightfully.

"And our new chief—he is sublime! He is fine! He is an ideal!"

"It is so," assented Shaw, occupying almost a minute in saying it.

"And those who seek us for the deaths of Maganninni and Sabastiano—they will not find us here! No!"

"No."

"Our fortunes will be made. We will rob the coaches on the highway; we will secure prisoners and hold them for ransom; we will become rich men; and then—ah!—we will return to Italia. *Bene!*"

"*Bene!*" assented Shaw.

"I am sleepy," said Nick. And in truth he was so. "I shall rest."

"And I," said Shaw.

"Captain Satan will awaken us when he returns," said Nick, as he threw himself upon a blanket after spreading another one out for Shaw.

Neither of the men had closed their eyes during all of the preceding night, and, in truth, they were both worn out. And so it is not surprising that, feeling perfectly secure, and having no idea that Codman had penetrated their disguises, they speedily dropped asleep.

Just precisely what it was that happened after that the detective never knew—that is, he did not for a space of some hours; but whether one, or two or more, he could not tell.

He was dimly conscious once, while he slept, of the fact that a man was bending over him; but, although he sought to rouse himself, he could not move his arms or open his eyes. With Shaw, the period was one of utter blank.

But at last consciousness did return to the detective. He opened his eyes and looked around him, at first without moving, and he was conscious of the fact that there was now only a dim light in the cavern, and that the figure of a man—of Codman, in fact—was seated not far away from him, and that he was at the moment silently regarding the recumbent figure of Shaw.

Then, instantly, two other startling facts rushed upon his comprehension. One was that his face was smarting, as if some lotion had been applied to it, and the other was that his wig was gone.

Instantly he realized that Codman had found them out. And with the realization came the added knowledge that he was chained to the floor of the cavern,

with an iron collar around his neck. His hands and feet were free, but he could not have raised his head six inches from the floor had he tried to do so.

But he did not make the attempt. Instead, he closed his eyes again, preferring to keep Codman in ignorance of the fact that consciousness had returned to him.

But it was not so with Shaw. He had not the forethought that Nick Carter possessed, and after a little Nick heard him exclaim:

"What the dev——!" And following it came a low laugh from the poisoner.

"How is the worthy landlord of the Morgantown Inn, to-day?" he heard Codman inquire ironically. "Well, I hope. Your friend, Nick Carter, seems to have slept more soundly than you. He has not awakened."

"Humph!" replied Shaw. "So you have found us out, have you?"

"Found you out? I knew you both, instantly, the moment I saw you, down there by the burned cabin."

"I think you are a liar," said Shaw coolly; "but I don't know as it makes any difference under the circumstances."

"No, my friend. You are quite right. It makes no difference under the circumstances. And those circumstances are going to be very serious ones for you two."

"Yes?" drawled Shaw. And Nick could have patted

him on the back for his coolness. "Go away—do! I am very tired and sleepy, and you make me more tired. You are worse than a blow-fly with your infernal buzzing."

Codman rose and stood for a moment looking down upon them both. Then he said:

"When Nick Carter wakes up, tell him for me that you have each just two hours to live. I shall return at the end of that time, and I shall put you at once to death. How, does not matter. You cannot hope to escape, for your necks are chained to the rocks, and I have removed everything from your pockets. That was a very pretty game you played, and it might have worked if you had kept awake."

With that, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRAGEDY AT HELL'S BROTH.

The detective noticed with satisfaction that Codman went toward the direction of the entrance to the cavern when he departed, and as soon as he believed him to be out of hearing he spoke to Shaw.

"We seem to have gotten ourselves into a pickle, Shaw," he said.

"Hello! You're awake, are you? Yes, it does look that way."

"Codman means what he says, too."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"How are you located, Shaw?"

"I am anchored to a rock, with an iron collar around my neck. How is it with you?"

"Same here."

"We've got two hours in which to make some effort to work loose, Carter."

"Yes; that is what he said, but it may be only fifteen minutes, and again it might be that many days. You can't tell much about what Codman intends to do."

"I don't feel as if I could break this chain and collar in fifteen years," said Shaw. "Do you?"

"Hardly. However, we will try. I suppose when he returned and found us asleep he made us sleep a

little more soundly, and then made an examination to see if we were the real thing. That was a bad move of ours, going to sleep."

"Yes, but it cannot be helped now."

"I'm sorry that I brought you into this thing, Shaw."

"Oh, rats! I've been up against other things in my time. You won't see me flunk, Carter."

"I'm sure of that."

"And something tells me that we are going to get out of this, too."

"All right. I—hark! What is that? Don't you hear a noise?"

"Yes. It sounds as if somebody was creeping toward us—or some animal, perhaps."

"Hello, there!" called Nick loudly.

Instantly there came a reply, and there was joy in the voice that uttered it, too.

"Nick! *Nick!* NICK!" came the voice; and the detective recognized it at once as Chick's.

"Chick!" He replied. "Where are you?"

"Here. I'm coming as fast as I can. He said you were here. I am very weak, but—wait. I must save what strength I have."

It was a long time after that—indeed, it seemed hours, although it was really only minutes—before Chick was close enough to the detective to touch him. And then he put two articles into Nick's hands. One

of them was a short, heavy iron bar; the other was a small but sharp file.

"I found the bar after I got loose," he said. "I thought perhaps you could pry the iron staple from the floor with it. If not, you can do as I did and use the file, although it will take a long time to do it. I found the file in the dust where I was chained. Providence must have placed it there for me to find."

"Where is Ten-Ichi?" asked Nick.

"There. Where I was. He is chained to the floor. I came to find you as soon as I was at liberty to do so. I was too weak to attempt to help Ten-Ichi. He told me to find you."

"Good! Now, Chick, can you find that staple, near the back of my head?"

"Yes."

"See if you can force that bar through it. Will it go?"

"Yes."

"Now, you move that collar around my neck as I turn over. I think I can do it. So. That's right. Now use what strength you have in assisting me to my knees. After that I will be able to get a purchase on the bar. So. How far through have you got the bar?"

"About four inches, Nick."

"Good! Now help me to get my hands on it, and you turn around and put your feet against it. Every

little will help. Now, are you ready? One, two, three, push!"

It was then if ever that Nick Carter's great strength stood for him. The staple gave—slowly at first, then more, and at last, with a pop, it came loose from the floor, and the detective leaped to his feet. The iron collar was still around his neck, and there were six inches of chain hanging to it, but he was free.

Instantly he seized the bar again and leaped to Shaw's side, and in another two minutes the landlord was also on his feet.

"Come!" said Nick, then. "Show us the way to Ten-Ichi, Chick."

They passed fifty feet or more through a narrow corridor into another chamber of the cavern, where they found Ten-Ichi, chained in the same manner, and here it required the united strength of Shaw and the detective to move the staple.

But it was accomplished.

"And now," said the detective, seizing a lamp from the wall, "let us see if we can find our weapons."

But, although they searched that part of the cavern thoroughly, and consumed as much time as they dared, they could find no trace of them, and at last Nick ordered a return to the entrance to the cavern, where he said they would await the return of Codman.

"What is the matter with you and Ten-Ichi, Chick?" asked Nick. "You do not seem to be wounded."

"No; we are not wounded. It is Codman's drugs. I am as weak as a rat, and so is Ten-Ichi."

"Well, I'm not. Neither is Shaw. We will wait at the entrance to the cavern and tackle Codman when he returns—if he ever does. It may be that he left us there to starve and did not intend to return at all."

They made their way slowly to the entrance, and, having taken up their positions, waited with what patience they could for the return of the poisoner.

They had waited more than an hour, and Shaw, forgetting the caution that had been given him to remain silent, had just remarked that he had begun to believe that Codman did not intend to return at all when they were all startled by a "Ho! ho! ho!" from the depths of the cavern behind them. The laughter was followed instantly by two pistol-shots, and two bullets whistled ominously close to their heads.

At the same instant Nick leaped toward the sounds, regardless of the consequences, and he was closely followed by the landlord. Chick and Ten-Ichi remained where they were.

Ahead of them, Nick and Shaw could hear Codman retreating through the darkness. Now and then he turned and sent a bullet crashing through the cavern, but Nick and his companion kept doggedly on.

There was no light to guide them; only the sound of Codman's running feet as he fled from them.

But that was sufficient to guide them, and if they

could not make rapid progress, neither could the man they were pursuing.

An interminable distance that run seemed to the detective, and his face and hands were bleeding from contact with the rocky walls, when at last they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them which was, a moment later, blotted out for an instant as the form of Codman passed through it and so into the open daylight beyond.

Nick increased his speed now. He bounded forward and rushed out of the cavern to find himself upon the precipitous side of a mountain—or, rather, a hill—and to see Codman, twenty rods away, running with all the speed he could command toward the ridge of the hill.

If Nick had possessed a pistol then, he could have stopped Codman with a bullet in the leg; but as it was he could only make an effort to increase his own speed in order to overtake and capture the fugitive.

At the crest of the hill Codman turned and fired again, but the shot went wild, and Nick did not slacken his pace. And then Codman disappeared.

But when Nick reached the top of the hill he saw Codman again. He saw also that the doctor was running directly toward the edge of a precipice which formed one side of a deep gulf in the mountains.

Nick saw him arrive at the very edge of the precipice; he saw him turn and wave his hand mockingly;

he saw him turn, then, and raise his hands above his head after the manner of a person who is about to dive; and then he saw him leap outward into the gulf and disappear, head downward, like an arrow sprung from a bow.

In another moment he was at the edge of the abyss himself, and gazing down into the depths below him, and presently Shaw was at his side.

Below them, at a distance of sixty or more feet, was a round, black pool of water, which appeared to be swirling round and round with almost the speed of an electric fan. It was, perhaps, thirty feet in diameter, and the water seemed to rise and then fall again inside the huge, well-like hole it had worn in the rocks during the ages of its agitation.

"Did he dive into that hole?" gasped Shaw.

"Yes," said Nick. "He did."

"Then our chase is ended. Come away, Carter." He shuddered as he said it.

"Why?" asked Nick. "What is it? What is this place?"

"That hole there? It is bottomless. It is called Hell's Broth. Nothing that falls into it is ever seen again. Even a cork is sucked down and disappears. Some scientists who once visited it said that it is caused by an underground river. I don't know as to that. In that well-like hole the water rises and falls again twenty feet every sixty seconds. Come. Let us get

away. The career of Doctor Codman, the poisoner, is forever ended now."

"Yes," said Nick, looking down at the black and swirling pool, "I think it is."

That evening they were all back again under the hospitable roof of Morgantown Inn, where they found that Patsy was so much better that Doctor Stag had returned to the city, leaving him in the care of the local physician.

* * * * * * *

Jane Gore escaped. Not a trace of her could be found.

Collin Graeme, after three months of unremitting care on the part of Doctor Stag, entirely recovered from the effects of the poison that had been administered, and ultimately he returned to finish his course at college.

Nancy also recovered entirely from the effects of her harrowing experiences, and was reunited with her mother.

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THE END.

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